THE
REMOVAL OF UNTOUCHABILITY

By

M. K. GANDHI

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5

By

M. K. GANDHI

Compiled and edited by

BHARATAN KUMARAPPA

NAVAJIVAN PUBLISHING HOUSE
AHMEDABAD

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Even a reader well acquainted with Gandhiji's writings may not realize that the topic on which he wrote and spoke most was the removal of untouchability. This fact reveals the supreme importance he attached to it.

With his shrewd insight into what stood in the way of the nation's advancement he saw that what was responsible for our general decline was that we had allowed religion to degenerate into unthinking observance of tradition and custom. We had thrown away the life-giving grain and were feeding on indigestible chaff which was causing disease and slow death in our body politic.

The remedy, therefore, according to him, for our national ailments was not so much political or even economic as primarily spiritual. We must get back to the fundamentals of religion which are Truth and self-forgetting Love. We must remove from our social life all man-made barriers, all ideas of superiority and inferiority and see even in the 'lowest and the lost' amongst us the Divine nature which makes us all one. When we do so we shall not live in watertight compartments, each unmindful of the other and pulling apart, but will work with and for each other, thus becoming a united and strong nation.

But this was not just an intellectual belief with Gandhiji. He hated untouchability with his entire soul. He who loved freedom passionately could not tolerate suppression; he who taught and practised non-violence could not remain blind to the inhuman violence perpetrated on a section of our population, who were condemned to live outside the pale of civilization, without social amenities, made to do the dirtiest work, humiliated to the dust and treated with contempt.

No; no religion worth the name, Gandhiji was convinced, could be guilty of such atrocity. Certainly not

Hinduism, which taught gentleness towards the cow and harmlessness even to the insect world. Untouchability was contrary to this essentially non-violent spirit of Hinduism. So it must be cut out, root and branch, or Hinduism would perish. A religion which sanctioned such gross injustice to fellow human beings was no religion ; it was the device of Satan. In such flaming words did Gandhiji indict untouchability. The more he loved Hinduism, the more he hated this sickly growth which appeared to him to be eating into its vitals.

How was this untouchability to be removed? Not, according to him, by violence, nor even by legislation or mere governmental action. It had to be rooted out of the heart of Caste men, and, therefore, required long and patient effort. In the meantime, he urged, all the amenities available to others should be extended to 'untouchables'; such amenities, for instance, as temple worship, sanitary dwellings, water, clean food, education and healthy occupations. Where possible, they were to be enjoyed by 'untouchables' on equal terms with others, but where caste prejudice would not allow it, then these facilities were to be provided for them separately till such time as public opinion could be educated, for 'untouchables' could not be left in neglect till then.

Of all the injustices perpetrated on them, the one about which Gandhiji felt most keenly was their non-admission to temples. How dare we, he thought, prevent God's own people (Harijans or people of God as he called them) from access to Him in worship? This appeared to him the height of insolence. He could not bear it and he personally led a country-wide campaign, more especially in the South where orthodoxy was most entrenched, to have temples thrown open to 'untouchables'. He spoke with the zeal of a prophet. He was up against age-old tradition, vested interest, priestcraft, religious fanaticism, and hidebound conservatism, ignorance and superstition. It is amazing that in spite of it all, his efforts were crowned with phenomenal success.

He wrote much and spoke much at that time. It was not possible to include all of it in this volume. Nor was that necessary, as some of it was naturally repetitious, being a statement of his views on the same topic in similar conditions. It seemed well, however, to devote some space to his instructions in regard to the Vykom Satyagraha, as he laid down in that connection the lines along which non-violent resistance should be undertaken in the face of unyielding reaction.

Gandhiji's writings on his pet theme of the removal of untouchability are indeed voluminous. In compiling this book, we have sought to include only what is of permanent value or what is capable of guiding those engaged in work for the 'untouchables'. Consequently, for instance, we have not included much on the topic of separate electorates for 'untouchables', on which Gandhiji had a great deal to say, and against which he even fasted unto death. Our reason is that since the Constitution of independent India has in principle no place for communal electorates, separate electorates for 'untouchables' is no more a living issue for us or for future generations.

Titles have been altered to suit the extracts, and if, in editing, any slight changes have been made in the text also, it has been done with due care not to affect its meaning. The arrangement under sections is of course entirely ours.

July, 1954

Bharatan Kumarappa

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THE REMOVAL OF UNTOUCHABILITY

SECTION ONE: THE SIN OF UNTOUCHABILITY

1

MY LIFE'S DESIRE

I was at Nellore on the 6th of April. I met 'untouchables' there and I prayed that day as I have done today that if I have to be reborn, I should be born an 'untouchable', so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavour to free myself and them from that miserable condition. I prayed that if I should die with any of my desires unfulfilled, with my service of the 'untouchables' unfinished, with my Hinduism unfulfilled, I may be born again amongst the 'untouchables' to bring my Hinduism to its fulfilment.

[From a speech at the Suppressed Classes Conference in Ahmedabad]
Young India, 4-5-'21

2

THE SOURCE OF MY IDEAS

I regard untouchability as the greatest blot on Hinduism. This idea was not brought home to me by my bitter experiences during the South African struggle. It is not due to the fact that I was once an agnostic. It is equally wrong to think — as some people do — that I have taken my views from my study of Christian religious literature. These views date as far back as the time when I was neither enamoured of, nor was acquainted with, the Bible or the followers of the Bible.

I was hardly yet twelve when this idea had dawned on me. A scavenger named Uka, an 'untouchable', used to attend our house for cleaning latrines. Often I would

ask my mother why it was wrong to touch him, why I was forbidden to touch him. If I accidently touched Uka, I was asked to perform ablutions, and though I naturally obeyed, it was not without smilingly protesting that untouchability was not sanctioned by religion, that it was impossible that it should be so. I was a very dutiful and obedient child, and so far as it was consistent with respect for parents, I often had tussels with them on this matter. I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka as sinful.

While at school I would often happen to touch the 'untouchables', and as I never would conceal the fact from my parents, my mother would tell me that the shortest cut to purification after the unholy touch was to cancel the touch by touching a Musalman passing by. And simply out of reverence and regard for my mother I often did so, but never did so believing it to be a religious obligation. After some time we shifted to Porbandar, where I made my first acquaintance with Sanskrit. I was not yet put to an English school, and my brother and I were placed in the charge of a Brahmana who taught us Ramaraksha and Vishnu Puja. The texts *jale Vishnuh, sthale Vishnuh,* (the Lord is present in water, the Lord is present on land) have never gone out of my memory. A motherly old dame used to live close by. Now it happened that I was very timid then, and would conjure up ghosts and goblins whenever the lights went out, and it was dark. The old mother, to disabuse me of fears, suggested that I should mutter the Ramaraksha texts whenever I was afraid, and all evil spirits would fly away. This I did and, as I thought, with good effect. I could never believe then that there was any text in the Ramaraksha pointing to the contact of the 'untouchables' as a sin. I did not understand its meaning then, or understood it very imperfectly. But I was confident that Ramaraksha, which would destroy all fear of ghosts, could not countenance any such thing as fear of contact with the 'untouchables'.

The Ramayana used to be regularly read in our family. A Brahmana called Ladha Maharaj used to read it. He was striken with leprosy, and he was confident that a regular reading of the Ramayana would cure him of leprosy, and indeed, he was cured of it. 'How can the Ramayana,' I thought to myself, 'in which one who is regarded nowadays as an 'untouchable' took Rama across the Ganga in his boat, countenance the idea of any human beings being 'untouchables' on the ground that they were polluted souls?' The fact that we addressed God as the 'purifier of the polluted' and by similar appellations, shows that it is a sin to regard any one born in Hinduism as polluted or 'untouchable'—that it is Satanic to do so. I have hence been never tired of repeating that it is a great sin. I do not pretend that this thing had crystalized as a conviction in me at the age of twelve, but I do say that I did then regard untouchability as a sin. I narrate this story for the information of the Vaishnavas and orthodox Hindus.

[From a speech at the Suppressed Classes Conference in Ahmedabad]
Young India, 27-4-'21

3

THE CRIME OF UNTOUCHABILITY

Has not a just nemesis overtaken us for the crime of untouchability? Have we not reaped as we have sown? Have we not practised Dyerism and O'Dwyerism on our own kith and kin? We have segregated the 'pariah' and we are in turn segragated in the British Colonies. We deny him the use of public wells; we throw the leavings of our plates at him. His very shadow pollutes us. Indeed there is no charge that the 'pariah' cannot fling in our faces and which we do not fling in the faces of Englishmen.

How is this blot on Hinduism to be removed? 'Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you.'

I have often told English officials that, if they are friends and servants of India, they should come down from their pedestal, cease to be patrons, demonstrate by their loving deeds that they are in every respect our friends, and believe us to be equals in the same sense they believe fellow Englishmen to be their equals. After the experiences of the Punjab and Khilafat, I have gone a step further and ask them to repent and change their hearts. Even so is it necessary for us Hindus to repent of the wrong we have done, to alter our behaviour towards those whom we have 'suppressed' by a system as devilish as we believe the English system of the Government of India to be. We must not throw a few miserable schools at them: we must not adopt the air of superiority towards them. We must treat them as our blood-brothers as they are in fact. We must return to them the inheritance of which we have robbed them. And this must not be the act of a few English-knowing reformers merely, but it must be a conscious voluntary effort on the part of the masses. We may not wait till eternity for this much belated reformation. We must aim at bringing it about within this year of grace, probation, preparation and *tapasya*.

Young India, 19-1-'21

I abhor with my whole soul the system which has reduced a large number of Hindus to a level less than that of beasts. The vexed problem would be solved if the poor Panchama, not to use the word 'untouchable', was allowed to mind his own business. Unfortunately he has no mind or business he can call his own. Has a beast any mind or business he can call his own, but that of his master's? Has a Panchama a place he can call his own? He may not walk on the very roads he cleans and pays for by the sweat of his brow. He may not even dress as others do. It is an abuse of language to say that we Hindus extend any toleration towards our Panchama brothers. We have degraded them and then have the audacity to use their very degradation against their rise.

Young India, 12-6-'24

4

UNTOUCHABILITY

I would warn the Hindu brethren against the tendency which one sees nowadays of exploiting the suppressed classes for a political end. To remove untouchability is a penance that Caste Hindus owe to Hinduism and to themselves. The purification required is not of 'untouchables' but of the so-called superior castes. There is no vice that is special to the 'untouchables', not even dirt and insanitation. It is our arrogance which blinds us, superior Hindus, to our own blemishes and which magnifies those of our downtrodden brethren whom we have suppressed and whom we keep under suppression. Religions like nations are being weighed in the balance. God's grace and revelation are the monopoly of no race or nation. They descend equally upon all who wait upon God. That religion and that nation will be blotted out of the face of the earth which pins its faith to injustice, untruth or violence. God is Light, not darkness, God is Love, not hate. God is Truth, not untruth. God alone is great. We His creatures are but dust. Let us be humble and recognize the place of the lowliest of His creatures. Krishna honoured Sudama in his rags as he honoured no one else. Love is the root of religion.

Young India, 26-12-'24

5

THE EARTHQUAKE AND UNTOUCHABILITY

When at Tinnevelly I first linked the earthquake with untouchability, I spoke with the greatest deliberation and out of the fulness of my heart. I spoke as I believed.I have long believed that physical phenomena produce results both physical and spiritual. The converse I hold to be equally true.

To me the earthquake was no caprice of God nor a result of a meeting of mere blind forces. We do not know all the laws of God nor their working. Knowledge of the tallest scientist or the greatest spiritualist is like a particle of dust. If God is not a personal being for me like my earthly father, He is infinitely more. He rules me in the tiniest detail of my life. I believe literally that not a leaf moves but by His will. Every breath I take depends upon His sufferance.

He and His Law are one. The Law is God. Anything attributed to Him is not a mere attribute. He is the Attribute. He is Truth, Love, Law, and a million things that human ingenuity can name. I do believe with Gurudev 'in the inexorableness of the universal law in the working of which God Himself never interferes.' For God is the Law. But I submit that we do not know the law or the laws fully, and what appear to us as catastrophes are so only because we do not know the universal laws sufficiently.

Visitations like droughts, floods, earthquakes and the like, though they seem to have only physical origins, are, for me, somehow connected with man's morals. Therefore, I instinctively felt that the earthquake was a visitation for the sin of untouchability. Of course, Sanatanists have a perfect right to say that it was due to my crime of preaching against untouchability. My belief is a call to repentance and self-purification. I admit my utter ignorance of the working of the laws of Nature. But, even as I cannot help believing in God, though I am unable to prove His existence to the sceptics, in like manner, I cannot prove the connection of the sin of untouchability with the Bihar visitation even though the connection is instinctively felt by me. If my belief turns out to be ill-founded, it will still have done good to me and those who believe with me. For we shall have been spurred to more vigorous efforts towards self-purification, assuming of course, that untouchability is a deadly sin. I know fully well the danger of such speculation. But I would be untruthful and

cowardly if, for fear of ridicule, when those that are nearest and dearest to me are suffering, I did not proclaim my belief from the housetops. The physical effect of the earthquake will be soon forgotten and even partially repaired. But it would be terrible, if it is an expression of the divine wrath for the sin of untouchability, and we did not learn the moral lesson from the event and repent of that sin. I have not the faith which Gurudev has that 'our own sins and errors, however enormous, have not got enough force to drag down the structure of creation to ruins.' On the contrary, I have the faith that our own sins have more force to ruin that structure than any mere physical phenomenon. There is an indissoluble marriage between matter and spirit. Our ignorance of the results of the union makes it a profound mystery and inspires awe in us, but it cannot undo them. But a living recognition of the union has enabled many to use every physical catastrophe for their own moral uplifting.

With me the connection between cosmic phenomena and human behaviour is a living faith that draws me nearer to my God, humbles me and makes me readier for facing Him. Such a belief would be a degrading superstition, if out of the depth of my ignorance I used it for castigating my opponents.

Harijan, 16-2-'34

SECTION TWO: UNTOUCHABILITY AND SWARAJ

6

NO SWARAJ ALONG WITH UNTOUCHABILITY

So long as the Hindus wilfully regard untouchability as part of their religion, so long as the mass of Hindus consider it a sin to touch a section of their brethren, Swaraj is impossible of attainment. Yudhishthira would not enter heaven without his dog. How can, then, the descendants of that Yudhishthira expect to obtain Swaraj without the 'untouchables'?

We are guilty of having suppressed our brethren; we make them crawl on their bellies; we have made them rub their noses on the ground; with eyes red with rage, we push them out of railway compartments — what more than this has British rule done? What charge, that we bring against Dyer and O'Dwyer, may not other and even our own people, lay at our doors? We ought to purge ourselves of this pollution. It is idle to talk of Swaraj so long as we do not protect the weak and helpless, or so long as it is possible for a single Swarajist to injure the feelings of any individual. Swaraj means that not a single Hindu or Muslim shall for a moment arrogantly think that he can crush with impunity meek Hindus or Muslims. Unless this condition is fulfilled we will gain Swaraj only to lose it the next moment. We are no better than the brutes until we have purged ourselves of the sins we have committed against our weaker brethren.

But I have faith in me still. In the course of my peregrinations in India I have realized that the spirit of kindness of which the Poet Tulsidas sings so eloquently, which forms the corner-stone of the Jain and Vaishnava religions, which is the quintessence of the Bhagawat and with

which every verse of the Gita is saturated — this kindness, this love, this charity, is slowly but steadily gaining ground in the hearts of the masses of this country.

[From a speech at the Suppressed Classes Conference in Ahmedabad]
Young India, 4-5-'21

7

THE IMPASSABLE BARRIER

The existence of untouchability must remain an impassable barrier in the path of our progress, which we must break down with supreme effort. There seems to be a lurking thought with many of us, that we can gain Swaraj and keep untouchability. They do not even see the contradiction inherent in the thought. Swaraj is as much for the 'untouchable' as for the 'touchable'. A correspondent from Narayanavaram writes: "In our parts Panchamas are very badly treated by the Hindus, especially the Brahmanas. In the villages they are not allowed to go about the streets inhabited by Brahmanas. They must stand at a considerable distance when speaking to Brahmanas." Read Sahebs for Brahmanas and Indians for Panchamas, and see how you feel. And yet I have no doubt, that some Sahebs are infinitely better than some Brahmanas. God will not let us have Swaraj so long as we treat a brother as an outcaste by reason of his birth.

Young India, 22-9-'21

8
SWARAJ

I have said in no uncertain terms, that there can be no Swaraj without the removal of the curse (of untouchability) from our midst. Our being treated as social lepers in practically the whole world is due to our having treated a fifth of our own race as such. Non-co-operation is a plea for a change of heart, not merely in the English but equally in ourselves. Indeed, I expect the change first in us and then as a matter of course in the English. A nation that can throw away an age-long curse in a year, a nation that can shed the drink habit as we shed our garments, a nation that can return to its original industry and suddenly utilize its spare hours to manufacture sixty crores worth of clothing during a single year is a transformed nation. Its transformation must react upon the world. It must constitute even for the scoffer a convincing demonstration of God's existence and grace, and so I say, that if India can become transformed in this wise, no power on earth can deny India's right to establish Swaraj. In spite of all the clouds that are thickening on the Indian horizon, I make bold to prophesy, that the moment India has repented of her treatment of the 'untouchables' and has boycotted foreign cloth, that moment India will be hailed, by the very English officials who seem to have hardened their hearts, as a free and brave nation.

Young India, 29-9-'21

9

THE ROOT CAUSE

The curse of foreign domination and the attendant exploitation is the justest retribution meted out by God to us for our exploitation of a sixth of our own race and their studied degradation in the sacred name of religion. Hence is it that I have put the removal of untouchability as an indispensable condition of attainment of Swaraj. Slave-holders ourselves, we have no business to quarrel with our own slavery if we are not prepared unconditionally to enfranchise our own slaves. We must first cast out the beam of untouchability from our own eye before we attempt to remove the mote from that of our masters.

Young India, 13-10-21

10

FREEDOM

Swaraj for me means freedom for the meanest of our countrymen. If the lot of the Panchama is not improved when we are all suffering, it is not likely to be better under the intoxication of Swaraj. If it is necessary for us to buy peace with the Musalmans as a condition of Swaraj, it is equally necessary for us to give peace to the Panchama before we can, with any show of justice or self-respect, talk of Swaraj. I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever. I have no desire to exchange 'king log for king stork'. Hence for me the movement of Swaraj is a movement of self-purification.

Young India, 12-6-'24

11

SERVICE OF THE 'UNTOUCHABLES'

We have behaved towards these unfortunate brethren of ours nothing better than a man turned monster behaves towards brother man. And the programme of removal of untouchability that we have set before us is just some little expiation for a monstrous wrong. I admit that it was I who pushed the item to the forefront of the Congress programme, and any one bent on cavilling at me might say that it was a clever bait held out by me to the 'untouchables'. Let me say at once that that charge is idle. It grew on me very early in life that those who believed themselves to be Hindus must perform the penance in the shape of wiping out this stain before they could be proud of Hinduism, and as the majority of Congressmen were Hindus, and as the programme then put before the nation was not one of self-purification, I put it in the forefront of the Congress programme, in the conviction that unless the Hindus were prepared to wipe out this stain they could not regard themselves as fit for Swaraj. That conviction has come upon me as a self-evident proposition. If we came into power, with the stain of untouchability uneffaced, I am positive that the 'untouchables' would be far worse under that 'Swaraj' than they are now, for the simple reason that our weakness and our failings would then be buttressed up by the accession of power. That in brief is my position, and I have always held that this self-purification is an indispensable condition of Swaraj. It is not a position that I have arrived at today. It is as old as when I began to think of Swaraj.

Young India, 6-8-'31

12

UNDER SWARAJ

I gladly give my opinion as to what is likely to be the interpretation of the Congress resolution on untouchability. There will be no untouchability. The 'untouchables' will have the same rights as any other. But a Brahmana will not be *made* to touch anybody. He will be free to make himself untouchable and have his own well, his own temple, his own school and whatever else he can afford, so long as he uses these things without being a nuisance to his neighbours. But he will not be able as some do now, to punish 'untouchables' for daring to walk on public streets or using public wells. There will be under Swaraj no such scandal as that of the use of public temples being denied to 'untouchables' when it is allowed to all other Hindus. The authority of the Vedas and the other Shastras will not be denied but their interpretation will not rest with individuals but will depend upon the course of law in so far as these religious books will be used to regulate public conduct. Conscientious scruples will be respected, but not at the expense of public morals or the rights of others. Those who will have extraordinary scruples will have themselves to suffer inconvenience and pay for the luxury. The law will not tolerate any arrogation of superiority by any person or class whether in the name of custom or religion. But all this is my dream. I am not the Congress. Those who would have the Congress to do otherwise, had better make haste to join it and make others of their opinion join it. The Congress represents or it has a constitution wide enough to represent popular will.

Young India, 11-6-'31

SECTION THREE: THE NAME HARIJAN

13

'HARIJAN' FOR 'UNTOUCHABLES'

The other day a friend suggested to me that the word 'Harijan' (man of God) be substituted for the word Antyaja (the last-born) that is being used for 'untouchables'. It was a word used by the great saint Narasinha Mehta, who by the by belonged to the Nagar Brahmana community and who defied the whole community by claiming the 'untouchables' as his own. I am delighted to adopt that word which is sanctified by having been used by such a great saint, but it has for me a deeper meaning than you may imagine. The 'untouchable', to me, is, compared to us, really a Harijan — a man of God, and we are *Durjan* (men of evil). For whilst the 'untouchable' has toiled and moiled and dirtied his hands so that we may live in comfort and cleanliness, we have delighted in suppressing him. We are solely responsible for all the shortcomings and faults that we lay at the door of these 'untouchables'. It is still open to us to be Harijan ourselves, but we can only do so by heartily repenting of our sin against them.

Young India, 6-8-'31

14

WHY 'HARIJAN'

Harijan means 'a man of God'. All the religions of the world describe God pre-eminently as the Friend of the friendless, Help of the helpless and Protector of the weak. The rest of the world apart, in India who can be more friendless, helpless or weaker than the forty million or more Hindus of India who are classified as 'untouchables'? If, therefore, any body of people can be fitly described as men of God, they are surely these helpless, friendless and despised people. Hence, in the pages of *Navajivan*, I have always adopted Harijan as the name signifying 'untouchables'. Not that the change of name brings about any change of status, but one may at least be spared the use of a term which is itself one of reproach. When Caste Hindus have of their own inner conviction and, therefore, voluntarily, got rid of the present-day untouchability, we shall all be called Harijans ; for, according to my humble opinion, Caste Hindus will then have found favour with God and may therefore, be fitly described as His men.

Harijan, 11-2-'33

SECTION FOUR : NO SANCTION FOR UNTOUCHABILITY IN HINDUISM

15

HINDUISM AND UNTOUCHABILITY

Untouchability in its extreme form has always caused me so much pain, because I consider myself to be a Hindu of Hindus saturated with the spirit of Hinduism. I have failed to find a single warrant for the existence of untouchability as we believe and practise it today in all those books which we call as Hindu Shastras. But as I have repeatedly said in other places, if I found that Hinduism really countenanced untouchability I should have no hesitation in renouncing Hinduism itself. For I hold that religion, to be worthy of the name, must not be inconsistent with the fundamental truths of ethics and morality. But as I believe that untouchability is no part of Hinduism, I cling to Hinduism, but daily become more and more impatient of this hideous wrong.

[From a speech in Trivandrum]
Young India, 20-10-'27

16

THE SHASTRAS AND UNTOUCHABILITY

A very thoughtful Musalman once told me that so long as there was untouchability in Hinduism it was difficult for Musalmans to entertain any regard for that faith or its followers. I have repeated times without number that an 'untouchable' community is unknown to the Shastras. The weaver and the scavenger are not classed as untouchables by the Shastras. I am both. My mother was certainly a scavenger in as much as she cleaned me when I was a child. But she did not on that account become an untouchable. Why then should a Bhangi, who renders similar necessary service, be regarded as untouchable ? Even

if the whole world of Shastris were to be against me I would proclaim from the housetops that they are wrong in considering untouchability to be part of the Hindu religion.

[From an address before the Representative Assembly, Rajkot]
Young India, 26-2-'25

17

THE SPIRIT OF HINDUISM

Untouchability is not a sanction of religion, it is a device of Satan. The devil has always quoted scriptures. But scriptures cannot transcend reason and truth. They are intended to purify reason and illuminate truth. I am not going to burn a spotless horse because the Vedas are reported to have advised, tolerated, or sanctioned the sacrifice. For me the Vedas are divine and unwritten. 'The letter killeth'. It is the spirit that giveth light. And the spirit of the Vedas is purity, truth, innocence, chastity, humility, simplicity, forgiveness, godliness, and all that makes a man or woman noble and brave. There is neither nobility nor bravery in treating the great and uncomplaining scavengers of the nation as worse than dogs to be despised and spat upon.

Young India, 19-1-'21

I have always claimed to be a Sanatani Hindu. I am not a profound scholar of Sanskrit. I have read the Vedas and the Upanishads only in translations. Naturally therefore mine is not a scholarly study of them. My knowledge of them is in no way profound, but I have studied them as I should as a Hindu and I claim to have grasped their true spirit.

True, Hindusim does not regard untouchability as a sin. I do not want to enter into any controversy regarding the interpretation of the Shastras. It might be difficult for me to establish my point by quoting authorities from the Bhagawat or Manu-smriti. But I claim to have understood the spirit of Hinduism.

Young India, 27-4-'21

18

NO SANCTION FOR UNTOUCHABILITY

I assure you that in Hinduism there is no sanction for treating a single human being as untouchable. In the estimation of a Brahmana knowing and living his religion, a Shudra is as good as himself. The Bhagavadgita has nowhere taught that a Chandala is in any way inferior to a Brahmana. A Brahmana ceases to be a Brahmana, immediately he becomes insolent and considers himself a superior being. India owes a deep debt to the Brahmanas who voluntarily sacrificed themselves for the betterment of all. It was Brahmanas who have called God Servant of servants, the Purifier of the fallen. It was Brahmanas who taught that the prostitute and the Chandala could attain Moksha if she or he only purified her or his heart.

But unfortunately for the human race the Brahmana shares with mankind the frailties of all. In common with others he has neglected his duty of giving knowledge to mankind, of guiding them in the right and truest path. We glibly charge Englishmen with insolence and haughtiness. Let us, before we cast the stone at them, free ourselves from liability to reproach. Let us put our own house in order.

[From a speech in Ellore]
Young India, 11-5-'21

19

KARMA

A man's Karma is responsible for what he is, they say. But my Karma does not compel me to throw stones at a sinner. Religion is made to uplift and not to keep a man crushed under the weight of his Karma. It is prostitution of the grand doctrine of Karma to consign a man of lowly birth to perdition. Rama felt privileged to find himself honoured by a fisherman. The Hindu religion is replete with illustrations of great men lifting their unfortunate brethren from their miseries. Will not the modern Hindus copy their own great men, and once for all rub out the blot of untouchability that so defiles Hinduism ?

Young India, 22-9-'21

20

UNTOUCHABILITY IS AN EXCRESCENCE

I have never been able to reconcile myself to untouchability. I have always regarded it as an excrescence in Hinduism. It is true that it has been handed down to us from generations, but so are many evil practices even to this day. I should be ashamed to think that dedication of girls to virtual prostitution was a part of Hinduism. Yet it is practised by Hindus in many parts of India. I consider it positive irreligion to sacrifice goats to Kali and do not consider it a part of Hinduism. Hinduism is a growth of ages. The very name, Hinduism, was given to the religion of the people of Hindustan by foreigners. There was, no doubt, at one time sacrifice of animals offered in the name of religion. But it is not religion, much less is it Hindu religion. And so also it seems to me, that when

cow-protection became an article of faith with our ancestors, those who persisted in eating beef were excommunicated. The civil strife must have been fierce. Social boycott was applied not only to the recalcitrants, but their sins were visited upon their children also. The practice which had probably its origin in good intentions hardened into usage and even verses crept in our sacred books giving the practice a permanence wholly undeserved and still less justified. Whether my theory is correct or not, untouchability is repugnant to reason and to the instinct of mercy, pity or love. A religion that establishes the worship of the cow cannot possibly countenance or warrant a cruel and inhuman boycott of human beings. And I should be content to be torn to pieces rather than disown the suppressed classes. Hindus will certainly never deserve freedom, nor get it if they allow their noble religion to be disgraced by the retention of the taint of untouchability. And as I love Hinduism dearer than life itself, the taint has become for me an intolerable burden. Let us not deny God by denying to a fifth of our race the right of association on an equal footing.

Young India, 6-10-'21

21

UNTOUCHABILITY IN HINDU SHASTRAS

To The Editor, *Young India*

Dear Sir,

The question of untouchability which Mr Gandhi has thought fit to introduce as relevant to the political emancipation of India deserves more attention at the hands of the Hindus than what it has till now had. Mr Gandhi was till recently advocating the proper treatment of the lower classes by the so-called higher castes on the simple basis of humanity, and no Hindu could say nay to it. But the patriotic leader, secure now in his well-earned position of undoubted influence, is not satisfied with urging the betterment of the lower classes, but has begun to dictate to the people even on the religious aspect of the question. It is not very long ago that he mentioned that he could not claim to be a deep scholar of Hinduism as his knowledge was mainly derived from a reading of translations. He has now however mustered courage enough to say, that claiming to be a Sanatani Hindu he could assure his hearers that there was no warrant in the Shastras for this 'untouchability'. One would expect gentlemen of Mr Gandhi's position to be very careful before they make any statements. It is therefore very regrettable that he commits himself to such sweeping statements without turning over the leaves of a single Dharmashastra, for if he had done so he would have come across innumerable authorities for the much abused 'untouchability'. The Hindus who still retain faith in the Shastras will be quite willing to co-operate with him, if he confines himself to providing the lower classes with the decencies of secular life and to the removal of any arrogance on the part of the higher castes, but it will be an impossibility with them to recognize Mr Gandhi as a greater authority in their religion than their ancient Manu, Yajnavalkya, Parashara and all the other text-writers. It will be inconvenient to quote here all the texts bearing on the question. I shall therefore mention here a few and request your readers who are interested in the topic to look up the Shastras which abound in similar passages:

> "One who touches a Chandala, a woman in her menses, an outcaste, a woman recently confined, a corpse or a person that has touched it, becomes pure after a bath."
>
> —Manu 5—85. Also Gautama Dharmashastra 14—29.
>
> "One must keep a Chandala and an outcaste at a distance. If the distance is less than what is covered by the swing of a cow's tail, he must bathe with the clothes he is wearing."
>
> —Vyaghrapada

"The distance prescribed ordinarily for an outcaste, a woman in her menses, a woman recently confined, and a Chandala are a yoke, two yokes, three yokes and four yokes respectively."

— Brihaspati

"One must bathe if he touches a Chandala."

— Baudhayana

The word 'outcaste' is ordinarily understood as denoting one who by his persisting misdemeanour has fallen away from his caste. Even such a one is an 'untouchable'. But the word does not mean such a fallen caste-man only but includes certain definite castes also. "The offspring of a Shudra by the women of higher castes are outcastes; the Chandala is the most sinful among them." (Gautama 4—27, 28). What these offspring castes are and what their vocations, are detailed in chapter tenth of Manu-smriti. Most detailed instructions are given in the Smritis as to what are the purificatory ceremonies that have to be performed by one who touches the 'untouchables', talks to them, drinks water touched by them or owned by them or in wells or tanks dug by them, eats food seen, touched or owned by them, and so on. It will be clear from a perusal of all these rules, and also from the inclusion of a woman in her menses or recently confined (be she one's own wife) in the same category of 'untouchables' that the Shastras do not base their rules on any consideration of personal arrogance or superiority but purely on that of spiritual purity. As long as the Shastras remain the spiritual guides of the Hindus for regulating their conduct it will be mere ignorance to say that untouchability is not a religious question but a social one. I request that Mr Gandhi will take the trouble of reading the Shastras before he begins to proclaim what is or is not contained therein.

I might also mention that I remember Mr Gandhi referring in one of his speeches to the friendship between Rama and Guha as a proof of untouchability being un-Shastric. If he had studied the Ramayana he would have found that Guha was by caste a Nishada (one of the Anuloma castes) and was therefore not an 'untouchable'.

Tinnevelly

R. Krishnaswami Aiyar

I gladly publish the foregoing so that the readers of *Young India* may have the other side. Mr Aiyar is a learned vakil, and one would have expected of him better knowledge of my position than he betrays in his letter. I laid emphasis in all my speeches in the Madras Presidency on the unreasoning and cruel prejudice against the 'untouchables'. Do we treat the 'untouchable' Panchamas

as we treat our mothers and sisters whilst they are untouchable? I still confess my literary ignorance of the Shastras, but I do profess to understand the secret of Hinduism. And I venture to say in all humility but with all the strength I can command, that to perpetuate untouchability in the manner we have done is a serious blot on Hinduism, an unwarranted abuse of the Smritis and a negation of love which is the basis of Hinduism. I therefore do not hesitate to call 'untouchability' as practised today a Satanic activity. I invite Mr Aiyar to devote the talents God has given him to the service of the outcastes among his countrymen, and I promise that he will see the meaning of life that I see in the Hindu Shastras.

Young India, 20, 27-10-'21

22

UNTOUCHABILITY IN HINDUISM

I do not believe that all class distinctions can be obliterated. I believe in the doctrine of equality as taught by Lord Krishna in the Gita. The Gita teaches us that members of all the four castes should be treated on an equal basis. It does not prescribe the same *dharma* for the Brahmana as for the Bhangi. But it insists that the latter shall be entitled to the same measure of consideration and esteem as the former with all his superior learning. It is therefore our duty to see that the 'untouchables' do not feel that they are despised or looked down upon. Let them not be offered leavings from our plates for their subsistence. How can I accord differential treatment to any person, be he a Brahmana or Bhangi, who worships the same God and keeps his body and soul pure and clean? I for one would regard myself as having sinned if I gave to a Bhangi unclean food from the leavings from the kitchen or failed to render him personal assistance when he was in need.

Let me make my position absolutely clear. While I do hold that the institution of untouchability as it stands

today has no sanction in Hinduism, Hinduism does recognize 'untouchability' in a limited sense and under certain circumstances. For instance, every time that my mother handled unclean things she became untouchable for the time being and had to cleanse herself by bathing. As a Vaishnava I refuse to believe that anyone can be regarded untouchable by reason of his or her birth, and such untouchability as is recognized by religion is by its very nature transitory — easily removable and referable to the deed, not the doer. Not only that. Just as we revere our mother for the sanitary service that she renders us when we are infants, and the greater her service the greater is our reverence for her, similarly, the Bhangis are entitled to our highest reverence for the sanitary service they perform for society.

Young India, 22-1-'25

23

DON'T OMIT 'UNTOUCHABLES'

[With reference to an address of welcome presented to Gandhiji by the Jambusar Municipality, he remarked:]

I see that you have committed the error of omitting the 'untouchables'. A Municipality that ignores the 'untouchables' hardly deserves the name. The fact is that you wanted to flatter yourselves that you were honouring me, and you thought you could do so by referring only to a part of my activities. You can surely refer to a part of the activities, provided they are divisible. But I have so often said that my effort for the removal of untouchability is an integral part of my life, and you cannot isolate it from my other activities. I would not be a true Hindu, unless I live and move and have my being in trying to rid Hinduism of this curse. Those therefore who do believe in untouchability as part of Hinduism, or who are indifferent in the matter cannot give me an address of welcome. I am a Bhangi, a scavenger, a spinner, a weaver and a labourer, and I want, if at

all, to be honoured as such. Swaraj cannot be had without Hindu-Muslim unity and though we may not have it today, we are bound to have it some day — but the absence of Hindu-Muslim unity does not mean the destruction of Hinduism. At the worst we may have to fight a few pitched battles before we unite. The absence of Khaddar and Charkha similarly does not mean the destruction of Hinduism. But untouchability spells its ruin. We shall be the laughing-stock of humanity if we hug this curse, and the religion that nurses it shall stand condemned by the world.

Young India, 23-4-'25

24

SANATANI HINDU

A candid but friendly critic writes :

"You have often declared yourself a Sanatani Hindu, defining one as a believer in the Vedas, Smritis, etc. and laid emphasis on the institution of castes by birth as legitimately following from those 'scriptures'. Of course you limit the number of castes to the supposed pristine four. (I say 'supposed pristine' advisedly — for even as early as the times of the production of the Manu and other Smritis there had been already so many castes evolved out of and recognized over and above the ideal four, — although, be it noted, inter-dining and inter-marriage amongst them all had not yet come to be interdicted). Now the fourth or last in order of the 'fundamental' castes is the Shudra, which is debarred by those very 'scriptures', a belief in which you regard as the *sine qua non* of a Sanatani Hindu, as well as by their 'twice-born' professors, from studying or reciting the divine Vedas including the Gayatri, a recitation of which you mention as obligatory upon a Sanatani Hindu (without distinction of caste). So the question arises: How can anyone (e.g. a Shudra) be said to belong to a religion (viz. Hinduism as defined by you), if the mere reading, reciting or even the hearing of its scripture is tabooed to him, as though it were a sacrilege? How can you expect a man to be a swimmer without letting him step into water? Either one who is born a Shudra cannot be a Sanatani Hindu in your sense, or else a Sanatani Hindu must be something very different from what you define one to be. (I refer to you to your old article on 'Hinduism' 1921 and your address to the Cow-Protection-Conference at Belgaum as printed in *Young India*, 29-1-'25). I for

one who am a Brahmana by birth cannot glory in the name of 'Hindu' so long as an exemplar of *real* Sanatana Dharma like you permits the term to cover a bundle of contradictions like the one I had pointed out. Lastly, in view of your mention about Gayatri, may I humbly inquire whether you have in all your 'twice-born' life never omitted to include the Gayatri in your daily prayers ?"

I am not a literalist. Therefore, I try to understand the spirit of the various scriptures of the world. I apply the test of Truth and Ahimsa laid down by these very scriptures for interpretation. I reject what is inconsistent with that test, and I appropriate all that is consistent with it. The story of a Shudra having been punished by Ramachandra for daring to learn the Vedas I reject as an interpolation. And in any event, I worship Rama, the perfect being of my conception, not a historical person, facts about whose life may vary with the progress of new historical discoveries and researches. Tulsidas had nothing to do with the Rama of history. Judged by historical test, his Ramayana would be fit for the scrap-heap. As a spiritual experience, his book is almost unrivalled at least for me. And then, too, I do not swear by every word that is to be found in so many editions published as the Ramayana of Tulsidas. It is the spirit running through the book that holds me spell-bound. I cannot myself subscribe to the prohibition against Shudras learning the Vedas. Indeed, in my opinion, at the present moment, we are all predominantly Shudras so long as we are serfs. Knowledge cannot be the prerogative of any class or section. But I can conceive the impossibility of people assimilating higher or subtler truths, unless they have undergone preliminary training, even as those who have not made preliminary preparations are quite unfit to breathe the rarefied atmosphere in high altitudes, or those who have no preliminary training in simple mathematics are unfit to understand or assimilate higher Geometry or Algebra. .Lastly, I believe in certain healthy conventions. There is a convention surrounding the recitation of the Gayatri. The convention is that it should be recited only at stated times and after

ablutions performed in the prescribed manner. As I believe in those conventions, and as I am not able always to conform to them, for years past I have followed the later saints, and therefore have satisfied myself with the Dwadasha Mantra of the Bhagawata or the still simpler formula of Tulsidas and a few selections from the Gita and other works, and a few Bhajanas in Prakrit. These are my daily spiritual food — my Gayatri. They give me all the peace and solace I need from day to day.

Young India, 27-8-'25

25

IN DEFENCE OF UNAPPROACHABILITY

A Travancore correspondent writes:

"There seems to be a misunderstanding about the Brahmanas and their customs or *acharas*. You praise Ahimsa, but we the Brahmanas are the only community that observe it as a religious function. Any one who violates it is regarded as an outcaste by us. The very association with those who kill or eat flesh is considered by us as sinful. At the approach of the slaughterer, fisherman and toddy-extractor as well as the touch of the flesh-eater, wine-drinker, and the irreligious, our moral as well as physical atmosphere becomes poisoned, *tapas* or religious merit diminishes, and pure magnetism becomes lost.

"This we consider as pollution, and we have to bathe forthwith. It is by keeping up such rules that the Brahmanas have been able to preserve their hereditary virtues so long, even though time and fortune have undergone many changes. If free communication with others be allowed without these restrictions, the Brahmana will gradually degrade himself to the lowest of the outcastes, indulge in vices in private, and pretend to be pure, trying at the same time to do away with the barriers of restrictions which give him much trouble in keeping his sins secret. We know that many of the nominal Brahmanas of today are of this sort and that they are moving heaven and earth to drag others to their degraded level.

"These are the grounds on which unapproachability and untouchability have been enjoined on us. In fact this unapproachability and untouchability are nothing but a practical means of preserving and spreading our Ahimsa Dharma."

In the first place, the claim advanced on behalf of the Brahmanas as to vegetarianism is not wholly true. It is true only regarding the Brahmanas of the South. But elsewhere they freely eat fish, and in Bengal, Kashmir etc. even meat. Moreover in the South all meat-eaters and fish-eaters are not unapproachables. And even an 'unapproachable' who is severely pure is an outcaste because he is born in a family lawfully regarded as 'untouchable' or 'unapproachable'. Do not Brahmanas brush shoulders with meat-eating non-Brahmanas if they happen to be persons in authority? Do they not pay respects to the meat-eating Hindu royalty?

It is surprising and painful to find cultured men like the correspondent in their blind zeal defend an indefensible and tottering system, forgetting the obvious implications of their own argument. The correspondent strains at the *himsaic* gnat of meat-eating and swallows the trebly *himsaic* camel of deliberate suppression of millions of fellow beings in order to preserve an imaginary purity. I suggest to the correspondent that a vegetarianism that demands for its protection a degrading excommunication of others is not worth preserving. Thus preserved it becomes a hothouse growth doomed to perish under the first blast of cold air. I treasure vegetarianism. I am convinced that the Brahmanas have gained spiritual advancement through their vegetarianism and other self-imposed disciplinary restraints. But when they were at their height, they did not need protection for their purity from without. Every virtue loses its vitality when it becomes incapable of withstanding outside influences.

Moreover, it is too late in the day for Brahmanas to claim protection of the type mentioned by the correspondent. Happily the number of Brahmanas who not only disdain such protection but who are leading the reform movement at the peril of being persecuted is daily on the increase. And in that lies the best hope of the reform making rapid progress.

Young India, 21-1-'26

26

PROGRESSIVE HINDUISM

Hinduism is like the Ganga pure and unsullied at its source, but taking in its course the impurities in the way. Even like the Ganga it is beneficent in its total effect. It takes a provincial form in every Province, but the inner substance is retained everywhere. Custom is not religion. Custom may change, but religion will remain unaltered.

Purity of Hinduism depends on the self-restraint of its votaries. Whenever their religion has been in danger, the Hindus have undergone rigorous penance, searched the causes of the danger and devised means for combating them. The Shastras are ever growing. The Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Puranas and Itihasas did not arise at one and the same time. Each grew out of the necessities of particular periods, and therefore they seem to conflict with one another. These books do not enunciate anew the eternal truths but show how these were practised at the time to which the books belong. A practice which was good enough in a particular period would, if blindly repeated in another, land people into the 'slough of despond'. Because the practice of animal sacrifice obtained at one time, shall we revive it today? Because at one time, we used to eat beef, shall we also do so now? Because at one time, we used to chop off the hands and feet of thieves, shall we revive that barbarity today? Shall we revive polyandry? Shall we revive child marriages? Because we discarded a section of humanity one day, shall we brand their descendants today as outcastes?

Hinduism abhors stagnation. Knowledge is limitless and so also the application of truth. Every day we add to our knowledge of the power of Atman, and we shall keep on doing so. New experience will teach us new duties, but truth shall ever be the same. Who has ever known it in

its entirety? The Vedas represent the truth, they are infinite. But who has known them in their entirety? What goes today by the name of the Vedas are not even a millionth part of the real Veda — the Book of Knowledge. And who knows the entire meaning of even the few books that we have? Rather than wade through these infinite complications, our sages taught us to learn one thing: "As with the self, so with the Universe." It is not possible to scan the universe, as it is to scan the self. Know the self and you know the universe. But even knowledge of the self within presupposes ceaseless striving — not only ceaseless but pure, and pure striving presupposes a pure heart, which in its turn depends on the practice of *yamas* § and *niyamas* § — the *cardinal* and *casual* virtues. This practice is not possible without God's grace which presupposes faith and devotion.

Young India, 8-4-'26

§ *Yamas*, the cardinal virtues, according to Yogashastra are *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing) *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *aparigraha* (non-possession); and the *Niyamas* or the casual virtues are, according to the same authority, *shaucha* (bodily purity), *santosha* (contentment), *tapa* (forbearance), *swadhyaya* (study of scriptures), *Ishwarapranidhana* (resignation to the Will of God). — M. D.

27

I AM A SANATANIST

I have letters, some of them angrily worded, from those who style themselves Sanatanists. For them untouchability is the essence of Hinduism. Some of them regard me as a renegade. Some others consider that I have imbibed notions against untouchability and the like from Christianity and Islam. Some again quote scriptures in defence of untouchability. To these I have promised a reply through my public statements. I would venture, therefore, to tell these correspondents that I claim myself to be a Sanatanist. Their definition of a Sanatanist is obviously different from mine. For me Sanatana Dharma is vital faith handed down from generations belonging even to prehistoric period and based upon the Vedas and the writings that followed them. For me the Vedas are as indefinable as God and Hinduism. It would be only partially true to say that the Vedas are the four books which one finds in print. These books are themselves the remnants of the discourses left by unknown seers. Those of later generations added to these original treasures according to their lights. There then arose a great and lofty-minded man, the composer of the Gita. He gave to the Hindu world a synthesis of Hindu religion, at once deeply philosophical and yet easily to be understood by any unsophisticated seeker. It is the one open book to every Hindu who will care to study it, and if all the other scriptures were reduced to ashes, the seven hundred verses of this imperishable booklet are quite enough to tell one what Hinduism is and how one can live up to it. And I claim to be a Sanatanist because for forty years I have been seeking literally to live up to the teachings of that book. Whatever is contrary to its main theme I reject as un-Hindu. It excludes no faith and no teacher. It gives me great joy to be able to say that I have studied the Bible, the Koran, the Zend Avesta and the other scriptures of the world with the same reverence that

I have given to the Gita. This reverent reading has strengthened my faith in the Gita. They have broadened my outlook and, therefore, my Hinduism. Lives of Zoroaster, Jesus and Mahommed as I have understood them have illumined many a passage in the Gita. What, therefore, these Sanatanist friends have hurled against me as a taunt has been to me a source of consolation. I take pride in calling myself a Hindu, because I find the term broad enough not merely to tolerate but to assimilate the teachings of prophets from all the four corners of the earth. I find no warrant for untouchability in this Book of Life. On the contrary it compels me, by an appeal to my reason and a more penetrating appeal to my heart, in language that has a magnetic touch about it, to believe that all life is one and that it is through God and must return to Him. According to the Sanatana Dharma taught by that venerable Mother, life does not consist in outward rites and ceremonial, but it consists in the uttermost inward purification and merging oneself, body, soul and mind, in the divine essence. I have gone to the masses in their millions with this message of the Gita burnt into my life, and they have listened to me, I am quite sure, not for any political wisdom or for eloquence, but because they have instinctively recognized me as one of them, as one belonging to their faith. As days have gone by, my belief has grown stronger and stronger that I could not be wrong in claiming to belong to Sanatana Dharma, and if God wills it, He will let me seal that claim with my death.

My Soul's Agony (1933), 4-11-'32, pp. 6 and 7

28

PERIOD OF PROBATION

It is bad enough when dictated by selfish motives to consider ourselves high and other people low. But it is not only worse but a double wrong when we tack religion to an evil like untouchability. It, therefore, grieves me when learned Pandits come forward and invoke the authority of Shastras for a patent evil like untouchability. I have said, and I repeat today, that we, Hindus, are undergoing a period of probation. Whether we desire it or not, untouchability is going. But if during this period of probation we repent for the sin, if we reform and purify ourselves, history will record that one act as a supreme act of purification on the part of the Hindus. But if, through the working of the time spirit, we are compelled to do things against our will and Harijans come to their own, it will be no credit to the Hindus or to Hinduism. But I go a step further and say that if we fail in this trial, Hinduism and Hindus will perish.

Harijan, 5-1-'34

29

AN ADI-DRAVIDA'S DIFFICULTIES

A correspondent writes :

"(1) Are you really interested in the welfare of Harijans or are you actuated by any ulterior motive so as to show an increase in the population of Hindus ?

"(2) If you really think that untouchables form a part and parcel of Hindus, will you kindly throw light on the following Shlokas of Manu-smriti considered holy by the Hindus ?

> 'If any Panchama carries on any trade which a respectable man conducts, and then grows rich, he should be deprived of his wealth and driven out of his country. — Manu-smriti, 10-96.
>
> 'Whosoever that affords tuition to a Shudra, will enter hell along with him (Shudra). Any Shudra endeavouring to impart religious instruction to a Brahmana should be inflicted

with the punishment of the hot oil being poured into his mouth and ears. — Manu-smriti, 14-89.

'Any Shudra found talking with a loud voice should be branded with red-hot iron bars. Any Shudra occupying an equal seat with a Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaishya should be burnt with a red-hot iron.' — Manu-smriti, 8-276, 8-271.

"Hindus are commanded to observe this book as holy and act according to the injunctions contained therein. If you consider this as unholy, why should you not declare it as such and instead issue a new decree of your own called Gandhi-smriti?

"(3) Even Arya Samajists are removing this untouchability, and their novel procedure in carrying out this task is to perform the ritual Shuddhi and then to admit the individual into the fold. If the untouchable is really a Hindu, how does this necessity arise? Do you agree with them in this respect?"

The correspondent claims to be an Adi-Dravida and, therefore, he has every right to suspect my motive. The best answer, therefore, I can return to his first question is that he should await my death for forming a final judgment. Meanwhile, if he is prepared to accept my word, I would assure him that I set no value upon an increase in the number of Hindus so-called. False professors of a creed not only do no service to it but may kill it. The only motive, therefore, that guides me in working for the Harijan cause is to see Hinduism purified of the curse of untouchability. And if, in so becoming, it is represented only by one Hindu I would have no repentance but real joy that it was not dead.

The correspondent's second question is very pertinent; only he would not have put that question to me, if he had been a constant reader of the *Harijan* and had, therefore, known my definition of Shastras. But that does not mean that I swear by every verse that is printed in the book described as Manu-smriti. There are so many contradictions in the printed volume that, if you accept one part, you are bound to reject those parts that are wholly inconsistent with it. I hold Manu-smriti as a religious book because of the lofty teachings contained in it. The verses quoted by the correspondent are flatly contradictory to the spirit of its main theme. The correspondent should know that nobody is in possession of the original text. In fact,

there is no evidence to prove that a Rishi named Manu ever lived. Somehow or other, the genius of Hinduism has made the writers or the givers of the grandest truths efface themselves. Therefore, I have suggested to seekers after Truth the only safe rule for their guidance in studying Shastras, namely, that they should reject whatever is contrary to Truth and Ahimsa, the true foundations of all religions.

The correspondent's third question should rightly be addressed to Arya Samajists. It is news to me that Harijans are required by the Arya Samajists to perform the ritual of Shuddhi before being admitted to the Arya Samaj. But I have seen the Shuddhi ceremony performed in order to strengthen the Harijans in the due fulfilment of the vow that they take as to abstention from beef, carrion-eating, drinking intoxicating liquors, etc. The correspondent quite rightly says that, if an 'untouchable' is really a Hindu, no Shuddhi is required of him. If any is required, it is required of the Caste Hindu who has committed the sin of believing in untouchability.

Harijan, 6-4-'34

30

THE SHASTRAS

I regard myself a Sanatani Hindu, because I try to the best of my ability to obey the eternal precepts of the faith as embodied in the Shastras as I understand them. I do not regard as revelation the collection of verses printed under one cover as Smritis. I have no doubt that there are many interpolations in the Smritis and the other scriptural books. As I have said often enough in these columns, I reject as interpolations everything in the Smritis or other writings that is inconsistent with Truth and Non-violence or other fundamental and universal principles of ethics.

The idea of superiority and inferiority is repugnant to the most elementary principles of morality. A Brahmana

who considers himself superior to any single creature of God ceases to be a knower of Brahma. If we are children of the same God, how can there be any rank among us? The very first mention of Varna in the Vedas likens the four Varnas to the four main parts of the body. Is the head superior to the arms, the belly and the feet, or the feet superior to the other three? What will happen to the body, if these members begin to quarrel about rank? The law of Varna is one of absolute equality among all the creatures of God. It is the basis of all the religions of the world. The verses in the Smritis about Shudras deserve to be summarily rejected as being contrary to the spirit of humanity.

Harijan, 28-9-'34

31

EQUALITY OF LIFE

In the purest type of Hinduism a Brahmana, an ant, an elephant and a dog-eater (Shvapacha) are of the same status. And because our philosophy is so high, and we have failed to live up to it, that very philosophy today stinks in our nostrils. Hinduism insists on the brotherhood not only of all mankind but of all that lives. It is a conception which makes one giddy but we have to work up to it. The moment we have restored real living equality between man and man, we shall be able to establish equality between man and the whole creation. When that day comes we shall have peace on earth and goodwill to men.

[From a report of a conversation.]

Harijan, 28-3-'36

DR. AMBEDKAR'S INDICTMENT

I

The reader will recall the fact that Dr. Ambedkar was to have presided last May at the Annual Conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore. But the Conference itself was cancelled because Dr. Ambedkar's address was found by the Reception Committee to be unacceptable.

Dr. Ambedkar was not going to be beaten by the Reception Committee. He has answered their rejection of him by publishing the address at his own expense.

No reformer can ignore the address. The orthodox will gain by reading it. This is not to say that the address is not open to objection. It has to be read if only because it is open to serious objection. Dr. Ambedkar is a challenge to Hinduism. Brought up as a Hindu, educated by a Hindu potentate, he has become so disgusted with the so-called Savarna Hindus for the treatment that he and his have received at their hands that he proposes to leave not only them but the very religion that is his and their common heritage. He has transferred to that religion his disgust against a part of its professors.

But this is not to be wondered at. After all one can only judge a system or an institution by the conduct of its representatives. What is more, Dr. Ambedkar found that the vast majority of Savarna Hindus had not only conducted themselves inhumanly against those of their fellow religionists whom they classed as untouchables, but they had based their conduct on the authority of their scriptures, and when he began to search them he had found ample warrant for their belief in untouchability and all its implications. The author of the address has quoted chapter and verse in proof of his threefold indictment — inhuman conduct itself, the unabashed justification for it on the part of the perpetrators, and the subsequent discovery that the justification was warranted by their scriptures.

The questions that Dr. Ambedkar's indictment suggests are:

1. What are the scriptures?
2. Are all the printed texts to be regarded as an integral part of them or is any part of them to be rejected as unauthorized interpolations?
3. What is the answer of such accepted and expurgated scriptures on the question of untouchability, caste, equality of status, interdining and intermarriage?

Harijan, 11-7-'36

II

The Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis and Puranas including Ramayana and Mahabharata are the Hindu scriptures. Nor is this a final list. Every age or even generation has added to the list. It follows, therefore, that everything printed or even found handwritten is not scripture. The Smritis, for instance, contain much that can never be accepted as the word of God. Thus many of the texts that Dr. Ambedkar quoted from the Smritis cannot be accepted as authentic. The scriptures properly so-called can only be concerned with eternal verities and must appeal to any conscience i.e. any heart whose eyes of understanding are opened. Nothing can be accepted as the word of God which cannot be tested by reason or be capable of being spiritually experienced. And even when you have an expurgated edition of the scriptures, you will need their interpretation. Who is the best interpreter? Not learned men surely. Learning there must be. But religion does not live by it. It lives in the experiences of its saints and seers, in their lives and sayings. When all the most learned commentators of the scriptures are utterly forgotten, the accumulated experience of the sages and saints will abide and be an inspiration for ages to come.

Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfaction of my spiritual hunger. But I do know that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth. Varna and Ashrama are institutions which have nothing to do

with castes. The law of Varna teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. It necessarily has reference to callings that are conducive to the welfare of humanity and to no other. It also follows that there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful, and absolutely equal in status. The callings of a Brahmana — spiritual teacher — and a scavenger are equal, and their due performance carries equal merit before God and at one time seems to have carried identical reward before man. Both were entitled to their livelihood and no more. Indeed one traces even now in the villages the faint lines of this healthy operation of the law. Living in Segaon with its population of 600, I do not find a great disparity between the earnings of different tradesmen including Brahmanas. I find too that real Brahmanas are to be found even in these degenerate days who are living on alms freely given to them and are giving freely of what they have of spiritual treasures. It would be wrong and improper to judge the law of Varna by its caricature in the lives of men who profess to belong to a Varna whilst they openly commit a breach of its only operative rule. Arrogation of a superior status by any of the Varnas over another is a denial of the law. And there is nothing in the law of Varna to warrant a belief in untouchability. (The essence of Hinduism is contained in its enunciation of one and only God as Truth and its bold acceptance of Ahimsa as the law of the human family.)

I am aware that my interpretation of Hinduism will be disputed by many besides Dr. Ambedkar. That does not affect my position. It is an interpretation by which I have lived for nearly half a century and according to which I have endeavoured to the best of my ability to regulate my life.

In my opinion the profound mistake that Dr. Ambedkar has made in his address is to pick out the texts of doubtful authenticity and value, and the state of degraded Hindus who are no fit specimens of the faith they so

woefully misrepresent. Judged by the standard applied by Dr. Ambedkar, every known living faith will probably fail.

In his able address, the learned Doctor has over-proved his case. Can a religion that was professed by Chaitanya, Jnanadeva, Tukaram, Tiruvalluvar, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, Vivekanand and a host of others who might be easily mentioned, be so utterly devoid of merit as is made out in Dr. Ambedkar's address? A religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced. For that and that alone can be used as the standard to aspire to, if not to improve upon.

Harijan, 18-7-'36

33

FROM THE VYKOM SPEECH

I want to quote one historical fact that took place when I was here in connection with the Vykom Satyagraha. Some of you may remember that I had more than one serious discussion with the Shastris who were then residing within the temple precincts, and who were attached, if I remember rightly, to the temple in some shape or other; I am trying to give you as correct a version of that discussion as I can recall at the present moment. In support of the proposition that even roads leading to the temples were barred against Avarna Hindus although they were not barred against non-Hindus, they produced a book called Shankara-smriti. I had never heard of such a Smriti before I came to Vykom and heard it quoted. You will be astonished to find that when I had that Smriti translated for me, I could not find in it any authority for closing the roads. But I grant that it was enough for them that they believed that the Shankara-smriti supported their contention. Then, as I was negotiating through the then Commissioner of Police and with the Senior Maharani, I just asked the question, supposing as a result of the negotiations

the Maharani issued orders to open the roads to the Avarna Hindus, what would be their attitude to them ? Then without the slightest hesitation they said : 'Oh ! That is a different thing altogether ; a Hindu Prince or Princess has every right to issue an order which has the authority of a Smriti.' They said that was implied in Hinduism as Hindu kings are repositories of Hindu faith and they have every right to issue orders which are not inconsistent with Smriti. I asked them whether the same thing applied to the opening of the temples. They said, 'Most decidedly.' Let me tell you that these Shastris were not the only Shastris that gave this reply. I asked the same question to Shastris in Cochin and Tamilnad and they gave the same answer. As a matter of fact that is the historical evolution of Smritis and for that matter of the eighteen Puranas. They were all produced or inspired in response to the want of those times.

Harijan, 6-2-'37

34

AM I A SANATANIST ?

A Sanatanist is one who follows the Sanatana Dharma. According to Mahabharata it means observance of Ahimsa, Satya, non-stealing, cleanliness and self-restraint. As I have been endeavouring to follow these to the best of my ability, I have not hesitated to describe myself as a Sanatanist.

Harijan, 23-12-'39

SECTION V: UNTOUCHABILITY, CASTE AND VARNASHRAMA

35

VARNASHRAMA

[With reference to questions raised by a correspondent Gandhiji wrote :]

I have often shown the distinction between Varnashrama and untouchability. I have defended the one as a rational, scientific fact and condemned the other as an excrescence, an unmitigated evil. It may be that my denseness sees a distinction where none exists. It may be, too, that I see science where there is ignorance or superstition. But I do regard Varnashrama as a healthy division of work based on birth. The present ideas of caste are a perversion of the original. There is no question with me of superiority or inferiority. It is purely a question of duty. I have indeed stated that Varna is based on birth. But I have also said that it is possible for a Shudra, for instance, to become a Vaishya. But in order to perform the duty of a Vaishya he does not need the label of a Vaishya. Swami Narayan Guru does not need to be called a Brahmana in order to enable him to be, what he is reported to be, a Sanskrit scholar. He who performs the duty of a Brahmana will easily become one in the next incarnation. But a translation from one Varna to another in the present incarnation must result in a great deal of fraud. The natural consequence must be the obliteration of Varna. I have seen no reason to justify its destruction. It may be a hindrance to material ambition. I must be excused from applying material considerations to an institution that is based on religious considerations.

I have asked that a Panchama should be regarded as a Shudra because I hold that there is no warrant for belief in a fifth caste. A Panchama does the work of a Shudra

and he is therefore naturally classified as such when he ceases to be regarded as a Panchama. I do believe that this constant confusion between untouchability and Varnashrama and attack on the latter in the same breath as the former retards the progress of reform regarding untouchability.

It is now clear that the law of variation is left untouched by Varnashrama. Nay, it is provided for. Only, types do not vary in a few years or even in a few generations. There is no fundamental difference between a Brahmana and a Pariah, but he who runs may see that, class considered, there is a marked and noticeable difference between Brahmanas and Pariahs or for that matter all the four castes. What I would like my correspondent to join me in is a fight against an arrogant assumption of superiority whether it is assumed by Brahmanas or others. It is the abuse of Varnashrama that should be combated, not the thing itself.

Young India, 23-4-'25

36

VARNASHRAMA AND UNTOUCHABILITY

A correspondent writes :

"Is it not clear that if the principle of 'division of work based on birth' which you approve continues to be the basis of our social organization, the 'untouchables' will be always with us? What is more reasonable than to suppose that in that case those members of society who hereditarily perform such social duties as scavenging, corpse-bearing and grave-digging will continue to be looked upon as too unclean to be touched by the rest of the community? In all other countries scavengers, cobblers, barbers, washermen, grave-diggers, undertakers etc. are not considered untouchable either as individuals or as a class for the simple reason that in those countries these occupations are not hereditary and any member of any of the classes can at any time become a soldier, trader, teacher, lawyer, politician or priest. It seems to me, therefore, that the root of evil of the untouchability so peculiar to our country lies in our peculiar social system exclusively based on the principle of heredity. And it also seems to me that so long as we adhere to that principle we cannot hope

to get rid of untouchability. It is just conceivable that under the influence of mighty reformers like Ramanuja or under the stress of a strong political passion its virulence may abate from time to time but the evil cannot be wholly eliminated. I am afraid that every attempt to end untouchability without ending the caste idea will prove as futile as attempting to cut off a tree at its top."

The letter is very plausible and unless the reformer takes care the danger which the correspondent fears may become a stern reality. There is, however, a clear confusion of thought in the argument. Does untouchability in the case of a cobbler or scavenger attach to birth or to occupation? If it attaches to birth it is hideous and must be rooted out; if it attaches to occupation it may be a sanitary rule of great importance. It is of universal application. A collier, whilst he is engaged in his work is practically untouchable. He himself refuses to shake the hand extended to him and says, 'I am too dirty'. But his work finished, he takes his bath, changes his dress and very properly mixes with the highest in the land. Immediately, therefore, we remove the taint of birth, i.e. the idea of superiority and inferiority attaching to birth, we purify Varnashrama. The scavenger's children may remain scavengers without being or feeling degraded and they will be no more considered untouchables than Brahmanas. The fault does not therefore lie in recognizing the law of heredity and transmission of qualities from generation to generation, but it lies with the faulty conception of inequality.

Varnashrama, in my opinion, was not conceived in any narrow spirit. On the contrary it gave the labourer, the Shudra, the same status as the thinker, the Brahmana. It provided for the accentuation of merit and elimination of demerit, and it transferred human ambition from the general worldly sphere to the permanent and the spiritual. The aim of the Brahmana and the Shudra was common — Moksha, or self-realization — not realization of fame, riches and power. Later on, this lofty conception of Varnashrama became degraded and came to be identified with mere empty ceremonial and assumption of superiority by some and imposition of degradation upon others. This

admission is not a demonstration of the weakness of Varnashrama but of human nature which, if it has a tendency under certain circumstances to rise to the highest point, has also a tendency under certain other circumstances to go down to the lowest. What the reformer seeks to do is to end the curse of untouchability and to restore Varnashrama to its proper place. Whether Varnashrama thus transmuted will survive the reform or not remains to be seen. It will surely depend upon the new Brahmana class that is imperceptibly coming into being, namely, those who are dedicating themselves, body, soul and mind, to the service of Hinduism and the country. If they have nothing of worldly ambition, it will be well with Hinduism; if they have, Hinduism like any other ism coming into the hands of ambitious men will perish. But I have an immutable faith in the capacity of Hinduism to purge itself of all impurities from time to time. I do not think that the capacity is now exhausted.

Young India, 13-8-'25

37

THE CANKER OF SUPERIORITY

I notice throughout my tour in Cutch that as in other parts of India 'untouchables' have among themselves also superior and inferior castes and the higher caste Antyaja will not touch the lower caste, will positively refuse to send their children to those belonging to the lower caste. Intermarriage and interdining between them is unthinkable. This is caste reduced to the grossest absurdity. And it is by way of protest against this arrogation of superiority by one class over another that I delight in calling myself a Bhangi, that is a sweeper, beyond which so far as I am aware, inferiority does not travel. It is necessary if we will rid Hinduism of the curse of unnatural inequalities, for some of us to rise with our whole soul in revolt against it. In my opinion he who claims superiority by the very nature of the claim forfeits it. Real, natural superiority,

comes without the claiming. It is recognized ungrudgingly and ever refused not pompously, not out of a false sense of modesty but because the superiority is not even felt, and because the superior man knows that there is no distinction whatsoever between the soul within himself and the soul within one who regards himself as his inferior. Recognition of the essential identity and oneness of all that lives excludes the very idea of superiority and inferiority. Life is duty, not a bundle of rights and privileges. That religion is doomed to destruction which bases itself upon a system of gradations high and low. Such is not the meaning for me of Varnashrama. I believe in it because I imagine that it defines the duties of men belonging to different vocations. And Brahmana is he who is the servant of all, even of the Shudras and the 'untouchables'. He dedicates his all to such service and lives upon the charity and sufferance of his fellow-beings. He is no Kshatriya who puts forth pretensions to rank, power and privileges. He alone is a Kshatriya who uses the whole of himself for the defence and honour of society. And a Vaishya who earns for himself only, and believes in merely amassing wealth is a thief. A Shudra because he labours for hire on behalf of society is in no way inferior to the three classes. According to my conception of Hinduism there is no such thing as a fifth or 'untouchable' class. The so-called untouchables are as much privileged labourers of society as Shudras. Varnashrama seems to me to be an ideal system conceived for the highest good of society. What we see today is a travesty and a mockery of the original. And if Varnashrama is to abide, Hindus must sweep away the mockery and restore Varnashrama to its pristine dignity.

Young India, 5-11-'25

THE FOUR CASTES

Q: You regard the four divisions of castes as based on birth. You also believe that a man's caste does not prevent him from doing the duties attaching to other castes, and that any man irrespective of his birth may have the qualities of a Brahmana or a Kshatriya or a Shudra. If this is the case, where is the use of maintaining this division, and consequently an order of superiority and inferiority? Why should the accident of birth make a man a Brahmana, or a Kshatriya or a Shudra? Why attach so much importance to birth?

A: In accepting the fourfold division, I am simply accepting the laws of Nature, taking for granted what is inherent in human nature, and the law of heredity. We are born with some of the traits of our parents. The fact that a human being is born only in the human species shows that some characteristic i.e. caste is determined by birth. There is scope enough for freedom of the will inasmuch as we can to a certain extent re-form some of our inherited characteristics. It is not possible in one birth entirely to undo the results of our past doings, and in the light of it, it is in every way right and proper to regard him as a Brahmana who is born of Brahmana parents. A Brahmana may, by doing the deeds of a Shudra, become a Shudra in this very birth, but the world loses nothing in continuing to treat him as a Brahmana. Caste as it exists today is no doubt a travesty of the original fourfold division which only defined men's different callings. And this trifling with it has been its undoing. But how can I, for that reason, discard the law of Nature which I see being fulfilled at every step? I know that if I discard it, I would be rid of a lot of trouble. But that would be an idle short cut. I have declared from the housetops that a man's caste is no matter for pride, that no

superiority or inferiority attaches to any of the four divisions. A true Brahmana will feel it an honour to serve the lowliest of Shudras. In fact a Brahmana, to be a Brahmana, should have the qualities of a Kshatriya, a Vaishya and a Shudra plus his own. Only he should predominantly be a man of divine knowledge. But caste today is in the crucible and only Heaven knows, or perhaps the Brahmanas know, the final result.

Young India, 21-1-'26

39

MY VARNASHRAMA DHARMA

Fight by all means the monster that passes for Varnashrama today, and you will find me working side by side with you. My Varnashrama enables me to dine with anybody who will give me clean food, be he Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi, whatever he is. My Varnashrama accommodates a Pariah girl under my own roof as my own daughter. My Varnashrama accommodates many Panchama families with whom I dine with the greatest pleasure, —to dine with whom is a privilege. My Varnashrama refuses to bow the head before the greatest potentate on earth, but my Varnashrama compels me to bow down my head in all humility before knowledge, before purity, before every person, where I see God face to face.

Young India, 22-9-'27

40

VARNASHRAMA DHARMA

I would gladly explain my meaning of Varnashrama more fully than I have done in order to remove the slightest misunderstanding as to this question of superiority. In my opinion there is no such thing as inherited or acquired superiority. I believe in the rock-bottom doctrine of Advaita and my interpretation of Advaita excludes totally any idea of superiority at any stage whatsoever. I believe implicitly that all men are born equal. All—whether born in India or in England or America or in any circumstances whatsoever—have the same soul as any other. And it is because I believe in this inherent equality of all men that I fight the doctrine of superiority which many of our rulers arrogate to themselves. I have fought this doctrine of superiority in South Africa inch by inch, and it is because of that inherent belief, that I delight in calling myself a scavenger, a spinner, a weaver, a farmer and a labourer. And I have fought against the Brahmanas themselves wherever they have claimed any superiority for themselves either by reason of their birth or by reason of their subsequently acquired knowledge. *I consider that it is unmanly for any person to claim superiority over a fellow-being.* And there is the amplest warrant for the belief that I am enunciating in the Bhagavadgita, and I am therefore through and through with every Non-Brahmana when he fights this monster of superiority, whether it is claimed by a Brahmana or by anybody else. He who claims superiority at once forfeits the claim to be called a man.

But in spite of all this I still believe in Varnashrama Dharma. Varnashrama Dharma, to my mind, is a law which however much you and I may deny, cannot be abrogated. To admit the working of the law is to free ourselves for the only pursuit in life for which we are born. Varnashrama Dharma is humility. Whilst I have said that all men and women are born equal, I do not wish therefore to suggest

that qualities are not inherited, but on the contrary, I believe that just as every one inherits a particular form, so does he inherit the particular characteristics and qualities of his progenitors, and to make this admission is to conserve one's energy. That frank admission, if he will act up to it, would put a legitimate curb upon our material ambitions, and thereby our energy is set free for extending the field of spiritual research and spiritual evolution. It is this doctrine of Varnashrama which I have always accepted. You would be entitled to say that this is not how Varnashrama is understood in these days. I have myself said times without number that Varnashrama as it is at present understood and practised is a monstrous parody of the original, but in order to demolish this distortion let us not seek to demolish the original. And if you say that the idealistic Varnashrama which I have placed before you is quite all right you have admitted all that I like you to admit.

Young India, 29-9-'27

41

VARNA AND CASTE

So far as I know anything at all of Hinduism, the meaning of Varna is incredibly simple. It simply means the following on the part of us all, of the hereditary and traditional calling of our forefathers, in so far as that traditional calling is not inconsistent with fundamental ethics, and this only for the purpose of earning one's livelihood. I regard this as the law of our being, if we would accept the definition of man given in all religions. Of all the animal creation of God, man is the only animal who has been created in order that he may know his Maker. Man's aim in life is not therefore to add from day to day to his material prospects and to his material possessions but his predominant calling is from day to day to come nearer his own Maker, and from this definition it was that the Rishis of old discovered this law of our being. You will realize that if all of us follow this law of Varna we would limit our

material ambition, and our energy would be set free for exploring those vast fields whereby and wherethrough we can know God. As years go by, the conviction is daily growing upon me that Varna is the law of man's being and therefore as necessary for Christianity and Islam, as it has been necessary for Hinduism and has been its saving. I refuse, therefore, to believe that Varnashrama has been the curse of Hinduism, as it is the fashion nowadays in the South on the part of some Hindus to say. But that does not mean that you and I may tolerate for one moment or be gentle towards the hideous travesty of Varnashrama that we see about us today. There is nothing in common between Varnashrama and caste. Caste, if you will, is undoubtedly a drag upon Hindu progress, and untouchability is as I have already called it or described it an excrescence upon Varnashrama. It is a weedy growth fit only to be weeded out, as we weed out the weeds that we see growing in wheat fields or rice fields. In this conception of Varna, there is absolutely no idea of superiority and inferiority.

[From a speech in Trivandrum]
Young India, 20-10-'27

42

THE LAW OF VARNA

'Varna' means pre-determination of the choice of man's profession. The law of Varna is that a man shall follow the profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood. Every child naturally follows the 'colour' of his father, or chooses his father's profession. Varna therefore is in a way the law of heredity. Varna is not a thing that is superimposed on Hindus but men who were trustees for their welfare discovered the law for them. It is not a human invention, but an immutable law of nature — the statement of a tendency that is ever present and at work like Newton's law of gravitation. Just as the law of gravitation existed even before it was discovered, so did the law of Varna. It was given to the Hindus to discover that law.

By their discovery and application of certain laws of nature, the peoples of the West have easily increased their material possessions. Similarly, Hindus by their discovery of this irresistible social tendency have been able to achieve in the spiritual field what no other nation in the world has achieved.

Q : If a man practises a profession which does not belong to him by birth, what Varna does he belong to ?

A : According to the Hindu belief he belongs to the Varna in which he is born, but by not living up to it he will be doing violence to himself and becomes a degraded being, a *patita*.

Q : A Shudra does an act which belongs to a Brahmana by birth. Does he become a *patita* ?

A : A Shudra has as much right to knowledge as a Brahmana but he falls from his estate if he tries to gain livelihood through teaching. In ancient times there were automatic trade guilds, and it was an unwritten law to support all the members of the profession. A hundred years ago, a carpenter's son never wanted to become a lawyer. Today he does, because he finds the profession the easiest way to steal money. The lawyer thinks that he must charge Rs 15,000 as fees for the exercise of his brain and a physician like Hakim Saheb thinks that he must charge Rs 1,000 a day for his medical advice !

Q : But may not a man follow a profession after his heart ?

A : But the only profession after his heart should be the profession of his fathers. There is nothing wrong in choosing that profession, on the contrary it is noble. What we find today are freaks, and that is why there is violence and disruption of society. Let us not confound ourselves by superficial illustrations. There are thousands of carpenters' sons following their fathers' callings, but not even a hundred carpenters' sons who are lawyers. In ages gone by there was not the ambition of encroaching on others' profession and amassing wealth. In Cicero's time, for instance, the lawyer's was an honorary profession. And it

would be quite right for any brainy carpenter to become a lawyer for service, not for money. Later ambition for fame and wealth crept in. Physicians served the society and rested content with what it gave them, but now they have become traders and even a danger to society. The medical and the legal professions were deservedly called liberal when the motive was purely philanthropic.

Q : You have been saying that the law of Varna curbs our worldly ambition. How ?

A : When I follow my father's profession, I need not even go to a school to learn it, and my mental energy is set free for spiritual pursuits, because my money or rather livelihood is ensured. Varna is the best form of insurance for happiness and for real religious pursuit. When I concentrate my energy on other pursuits, I sell away my powers of self-realization or sell my soul for a mess of pottage.

Q : You talk of releasing the energies for spiritual pursuits. Today those who follow their father's profession have no spiritual culture at all—their very Varna unfits them for it.

A : We are talking with crooked notions of Varna. When Varna was really practised, we had enough leisure for spiritual training. Even now, you go to distant villages and see what spiritual culture villagers have as compared to the town-dwellers. These know no self-control.

But you have spotted the mischief of the age. Let us not try to be what others cannot be. I would not even learn the Gita if every one who wished could not do it. That is why my whole soul rises against learning English for making money. We have to re-arrange our lives so that we ensure to the millions the leisure that a fraction of us have today, and we cannot do it unless we follow the law of Varna.

Q : What is the Varna of a man practising different professions at different times ?

A : It may not make any difference in his Varna so long as he gains his livelihood by following his father's

profession. He may do anything he likes so long as he does it for love of service. But he who changes profession from time to time for the sake of gaining wealth degrades himself and falls from Varna.

Q: Do you believe that qualities attaching to Varna are inherited and not acquired?

A: They can be acquired. The inherited qualities can always be strengthened and new ones cultivated. But we need not, ought not, to seek new avenues for gaining wealth. We should be satisfied with those we have inherited from our forefathers so long as they are pure.

Q: Do you not find a man exhibiting qualities opposed to his family character?

A: That is a difficult question. We do not know all our antecedents. If my father is a trader and I exhibit the qualities of a soldier, I may without reward serve my country as a soldier but must be content to earn my bread by trading.

Young India, 24-11-'27

43

UNTOUCHABILITY, CASTE AND VARNA

Q: Why do you restrict the movement to the removal of untouchability only? Why not do away with the caste system altogether? If there is a difference between caste and caste, and caste and untouchability, is it not one only of degree?

A: There are innumerable castes in India. They are a social institution. They are so many trade guilds, as was well said by the late Sir William Wilson Hunter. And at one time they served a very useful purpose, as, perhaps, they are even now doing to a certain extent. This institution has superadded to it restrictions which, in my opinion, are undesirable and are bound to go in course of time. There is nothing sinful about them. They retard the material progress of those who are labouring under them. They are no bar to their spiritual progress. The difference,

therefore, between the caste system and untouchability is not one of degree, but of kind. An 'untouchable' is outside the pale of respectable society. He is hardly treated as a human being. He is an outcaste hurled into an abyss by his fellow-beings occupying the same platform. The difference, therefore, is somewhat analogous to the difference between heaven and hell.

There is one thing more to be remembered about the caste system. For me, it is not the same as Varnashrama Dharma. Whilst the caste system is an answer to the social need, Varnashrama is based upon the Hindu scriptures. Not so the caste system. While there are innumerable castes (some dying out and new ones coming into being), the Varnas are, and have always been four. I am a firm believer in Varnashrama. I have not hesitated before now to consider it as a gift of Hinduism to mankind. Acceptance of that Dharma is, so far as I have been able to see it, a condition of spiritual growth. The four divisions are not a vertical section, but a horizontal plane on which all stand on a footing of equality, doing the services respectively assigned to them. In the book of God, the same number of marks are assigned to the Brahmana that has done his task well as to the Bhangi who has done likewise.

Harijan, 11-2-'33

44

ATTACK ON 'HIGH-AND-LOW'NESS

Untouchability is the product, not of the caste system, but of the distinction of high and low that has crept into Hinduism and is corroding it. The attack on untouchability is thus an attack upon this 'high-and-low'ness. The moment untouchability goes, the caste system itself will be purified, that is to say, according to my dream, it will resolve itself into the true Varnadharma, the four divisions of society, each complementary of the other and none inferior or superior to any other, each as necessary for the whole body of Hinduism as any other.

Harijan, 11-2-'33

45

NOT MERELY BY BIRTH

The following three verses from Madame Wadia's instructive address delivered the other day will bear reproduction :

"Listen to these words of Yudhishthira in the Vanaparva of the Mahabharata :

'Truth, charity, forgiveness, good conduct, gentleness, austerity and mercy, where these are seen, O King of the Serpents, there is a Brahmana. If these marks exist in a Shudra and are not in a Dvija, the Shudra is not a Shudra, nor the Brahmana a Brahmana.'

And in the Vishnu-Bhagavata we read :

'What is said as to the marks of conduct indicative of a man's caste, if those marks are found in another, designate him by the caste of his marks' (i.e. not of his body and birth).

But some of you would prefer Manu-smriti. Well, here you are :

'As a wooden elephant, as a leathern deer, such is an unlearned Brahmana ; these three bear only names. The Brahmana, who, not having studied Vedas, labours elsewhere, becomes a Shudra in that very life together with his descendants.'"

These and numerous other verses from the Shastras unmistakably show that mere birth counts for nothing. A person must show corresponding works and character to establish his claim by birth.

Harijan, 15-4-'33

46

CASTE AND VARNA

In your Hinduism do you basically include the caste system ?

I do not. Hinduism does not believe in caste. I would obliterate it at once. But I believe in Varnadharma which is the law of life.

The law of Varna is nothing but the law of conservation of energy. Why should my son not be a scavenger if I am one ?

Indeed ? Do you go so far ?

I do, because I hold a scavenger's profession in no way inferior to a clergyman's.

I grant that, but should Lincoln have been a wood-chopper rather than President of the U. S. A. ?

But why should not a wood-chopper be a President of the United States ? Gladstone used to chop wood.

But he did not accept it as his calling.

He would not have been worse off if he had done so. What I mean is, one born a scavenger must earn his livelihood by being a scavenger, and then do whatever else he likes. For a scavenger is as worthy of his hire as a lawyer or your President. That, according to me, is Hinduism. There is no better communism on earth. Varnadharma acts even as the law of gravitation. I cannot cancel it or its working by trying to jump higher and higher day by day till gravitation ceases to work. That effort will be vain. So is the effort to jump over one another. The law of Varna is the antithesis of competition which kills.

Harijan, 6-3-'37

47

UNTOUCHABILITY AND CASTE

Q: In your recent correspondence with Shri Shyamlal you have said that caste ought to go root and branch if untouchability is to be completely eradicated. Then, why do you not make anti-untouchability work part of a wider crusade against the caste system itself? If you dig out the root, the branches will wither by themselves.

A: It is one thing for me to hold certain views and quite another to make my views acceptable in their entirety to society at large. My mind, I hope, is ever growing, ever moving forward. All may not keep pace with it. I have therefore to exercise utmost patience and be satisfied with hastening slowly. As you must have seen from my preface to a recent Navajivan publication * of my writings on Varna-Vyavastha, I am wholly in agreement with you in principle. If I live up to 125 years, I do expect to convert the entire Hindu society to my view.

Harijan, 28-7-'46

* *Varna-Vyavastha*, Gujarati publication, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad-9, price As. 12, postage etc. As. 5.

SECTION SIX: REMOVAL OF UNTOUCHABILITY

48

THE NON-VIOLENT WAY

Just as I do not want the so-called touchables to despise you, so also I do not want you to entertain any feeling of hatred and ill-will towards them. I do not want you to wrest your rights by violence. The trend of world opinion is against such violence. I can clearly see a time coming in the world when it will be impossible to secure rights by arbitrament of force, so I tell you today that if you resort to force for the attainment of your purpose you will certainly fail. I do not want to employ diplomacy in my dealings with you or for that matter with any one. I do not want to keep you under any false illusion or win your support by holding out temptations. I would not exploit you for gaining any political ends of mine. The issue with me is bigger even than Swaraj. I am anxious to see an end put to untouchability because for me it is an expiation and a penance. Hinduism has committed a great sin in giving sanction to this evil and I am anxious — if such a thing as vicarious penance is possible — to purify it of that sin by expiating for it in my own person.

That being so, it follows that the only means open for my purpose are those of Ahimsa and Truth. I have adopted an 'untouchable' child as my own. I confess I have not been able to convert my wife completely to my view. She cannot bring herself to love her as I do. But I cannot convert my wife by anger, I can do so only by love. If any of my people have done you any wrong, I ask your forgiveness for it. Some members of the 'untouchable' class said when I was at Poona that they would resort to force if the Hindus did not alter their attitude towards them. Can untouchability be removed by force? Can the amelioration of the 'untouchables' come through these methods? The

only way by which you and I can wean orthodox Hindus from their bigotry is by patient argument and correct conduct. So long as they are not converted, I can only ask you to put up with your lot with patience. I am willing to stand by you, to share your sufferings with you. You must have the right of worship in any temple in which members of other castes are admitted. You must have admission to schools along with the children of other castes without any distinction. You must be eligible to the highest office in the land not excluding that of the Viceroy's. That is my definition of the removal of untouchability.

But I can help you in this only by following the way indicated by my religion and not by following Western methods. For that way I cannot save Hinduism. Yours is a sacred cause. Can one serve a sacred cause by adopting Satan's methods? I pray you, therefore, to dismiss from your mind the idea of ameliorating your condition by brute force. The Gita tells us that by sincerely meditating on Him in one's heart, one can attain Moksha. Meditation is waiting on God. If waiting on God brings the highest bliss of salvation, how much quicker must it bring removal of untouchability? Waiting on God means increasing purity. Let us by prayer purify ourselves and we shall not only remove untouchability but shall also hasten the advent of Swaraj.

[From a speech at the Anti-Untouchability Conference in Belgaum]

Young India, 22-1-'25

49

TO CASTE HINDUS

Brute force will not sustain untouchability. It will bring about a revulsion of feeling in favour of the suppressed classes. It is a sign of the times that there were at least some 'touchables' who tried to defend the poor 'untouchables'. One could wish that there were many more in Mahad. Silent sympathy on such occasions is not of much use. Every Hindu, who considers the removal of untouchability to be of paramount importance, should on such occasions prove his sympathy by publicly defending the suppressed classes and having his own head broken in defending the helpless and the downtrodden.

Young India, 28-4-'27

50

TO CASTE HINDUS

Let me tell you that it is not enough for you to hold the belief passively that untouchability is a crime. He who is a passive spectator of crime is really, and in law, an active participator in it. You must therefore begin and continue your agitation along all lawful and legitimate lines.

Let me if my voice will reach them, carry my voice to the Brahmana priests who are opposing this belated reform. It is a painful fact, but it is a historical truth, that priests who should have been the real custodians of religion have been instrumental in destroying the religion of which they have been custodians. I see before my eyes the Brahmana priests in Travancore and also elsewhere destroying the very religion of which they are supposed to be custodians, from their ignorance or worse. All their learning, when it is utilized in order to sustain a hideous

superstition, a terrible wrong, turns to dust. I wish therefore that they will recognize before it is too late the signs of the times and march with the events which are taking them and us voluntarily or involuntarily along the path of truth.

[From a speech in Nagercoil]

Young India, 20-10-'27

51

GOVERNMENT AND UNTOUCHABILITY

Governments cannot afford to lead in matters of reform. By their very nature Governments are but interpreters and executors of the expressed will of the people whom they govern, and even a most autocratic Government will find itself unable to impose a reform which its people cannot assimilate. So, if I was a subject of Travancore State I should be entirely satisfied to know that my Government was willing to carry forward this reform as speedily as the people were willing to assimilate it. But having satisfied myself of that one thing, I should not rest content for one single moment till I had carried the message of reform from mouth to mouth and village to village. Well-ordered, persistent agitation is the soul of healthy progress, and so if I were you, I would not let the Government rest till this reform was carried through. Not allowing the Government to rest does not by any means mean embarrassing the Government. A wise Government welcomes and needs the support and warmth and encouragement of such an agitation in order to achieve a reform which the Government itself wants. And I have no shadow of a doubt that if the Savarna Hindus could with one voice express their wish, this monster of untouchability would go. It would be wrong therefore to ascribe our own lethargy and slothfulness to the Government.

[From a speech in Trivandrum]

Young India, 20-10-'27

52

UNTOUCHABILITY AND LAW

Untouchability will not be removed by the force even of law. It can only be removed when the majority of Hindus realize that it is a crime against God and man and are ashamed of it. In other words, it is a process of conversion, i.e. purification, of the Hindu heart. The aid of law has to be invoked when it hinders or interferes with the progress of the reform as when, in spite of the willingness of the trustees and the temple-going public, the law prohibits the opening of a particular temple.

Harijan, 23-9-'39

53

THE FAST

With rare exceptions, at hundreds of these mass meetings or at private meetings in all parts of India, there has been no protest against my presentation of the case against untouchability. Crowds have passed resolutions denouncing untouchability and pledging themselves to remove it from their midst, and they have on innumerable occasions called God as witness to their pledge and asked for His blessings that He may give them strength to carry out their pledge.

It was against these millions that my fast was undertaken, and it was their spontaneous love that brought about a transformation inside of five days and brought into being the Yeravda Pact.* And it will be against them that

* An agreement arrived at in September, 1932 between the leaders acting on behalf of the 'untouchables' and of the rest of the Hindu community regarding the representation of the 'untouchables' in legislatures, and regarding also some other matters affecting their welfare. The Pact was made in order to nullify the British Premier's decision, which treated the 'untouchables' as a community apart from the Hindus and gave them separate electorates. Gandhiji started a 'fast unto death' against thus separating them from the Hindu

the fast will be resumed if that Pact is not carried out by them in its fulness. The Government are now practically out of it. Their part of the obligation they fulfilled promptly. The major part of the resolutions of the Yeravda Pact has to be fulfilled by these millions, the so-called Caste Hindus, who have flocked to the meetings I have described. It is they who have to embrace the suppressed brethren and sisters as their own, whom they have to invite to their temples, to their homes, to their schools. The 'untouchables' in the villages should be made to feel that their shackles have been broken, that they are in no way inferior to their fellow villagers, that they are worshippers of the same God as other villagers, and are entitled to the same rights and privileges that the latter enjoy. But if these vital conditions of the Pact are not carried out by Caste Hindus, could I possibly live to face God and man? I ventured even to tell Dr. Ambedkar, Rao Bahadur Raja and other friends belonging to the suppressed group that they should regard me as a hostage for the due fulfilment by Caste Hindus of the conditions of the Pact.

The (impending) fast, if it has to come, will not be for the coercion of those who are opponents of the reform, but it will be intended to sting into action those who have been my comrades or who have taken pledges for the removal of untouchability. If they belie their pledges, or if they never meant to abide by them and their Hinduism was a mere camouflage, I should have no interest left in life. My fast, therefore, ought not to affect the opponents

community. Consequently the Hindu community including leaders of the 'untouchables' met in conference with Gandhiji, who was then imprisoned in Yeravda Jail, and signed this Pact, which the British Premier had perforce to accept, as it represented the joint demands of the people concerned. The fast resulted also in the conference adopting a resolution to work for the redress of the grievances of the 'untouchables' and to wipe out untouchability. What has developed into the Harijan Sevak Sangh is the direct result of this resolution. — Ed.

of the reform, nor even fellow-workers and the millions who have led me to believe that they were with me and the Congress in the campaign against untouchability, if the latter have on second thoughts come to the conclusion that untouchability is not after all a crime against God and humanity. In my opinion, fasting for purification of self and others is an age-long institution and it will subsist so long as man believes in God. It is the prayer to the Almighty from an anguished heart. But whether my argument is wise or foolish, I cannot be dislodged from my position so long as I do not see the folly or the error of it. The fast will be resumed only in obedience to the inner voice, and only if there is a manifest breakdown of the Yeravda Pact, owing to the criminal neglect of Caste Hindus to implement its conditions. Such neglect would mean a betrayal of Hinduism. I should not care to remain its living witness.

My Soul's Agony (1933), 4-11-32; pp. 2-4

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NO ROOM FOR COMPULSION

There can be no compulsion in matters of religion. I should say, in any matter. The public know my very strong views against violence in any shape or form against anyone, no matter what his caste or creed or nationality may be. Let those in charge of the movement, therefore, understand that even in their impatience to save me from the prospective fast they may not force the pace by adopting questionable methods. If they do, they will merely hasten my end. It would be a living death for me to witness the degeneration of a movement in whose behalf, as I believe, God had prompted that little fast. The cause of Harijans and Hinduism will not be served by the methods of the rabble. This is perhaps the biggest religious reform movement in India, if not in the world, involving as it does the wellbeing of nearly forty million human

beings living in serfdom. The orthodox section that disapproves of it is entitled to every courtesy and consideration. We have to win them by love, by self-sacrifice, by perfect self-restraint, by letting the purity of our lives produce its own silent effect upon their hearts. We must have faith in our truth and love converting the opponents to our way.

There is no doubt whatsoever that deliverance of forty million human beings from age-long suppression will not be brought about by mere showy demonstrations. There has to be a solid constructive programme contemplating attack on all fronts. This enterprise requires the concentrated energy of thousands of men, women, boys and girls who are actuated by the loftiest religious motives. I would, therefore, respectfully urge those who do not appreciate the purely religious character of the movement to retire from it. Let those who have that faith and fervour, be they few or many, work the movement. Removal of untouchability may produce, indeed it will produce, great political consequences, but it is not a political movement. It is a movement purely and simply of purification of Hinduism. And that purification can only come through the purest instruments. Thanks be to God that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of such instruments working in all parts of India. Let the impatient sceptics watch, wait and see. But let them not mar the movement by hasty, ill-conceived interference even though it may be prompted by laudable motives.

My Soul's Agony (1933), 7-11-'32; pp. 19 & 20

55

HARIJAN MOVEMENT NOT POLITICAL

Gandhiji's attention was drawn to the speech of Shri V. V. Srinivasa Iyengar's address recently delivered in Madras at a Sanatanist meeting and reported in the local daily Press. His attention was drawn particularly to the following passages in the address :

> "Mr Gandhi, the great protagonist of temple entry, had proclaimed that the movement was not political but religious.... In the speaker's opinion that was not a religious movement but a great political movement. It was necessary for the politics of Mr Gandhi to present to the Government a united front and to placate the Harijans....The present temple entry movement was but a political stunt of Mr Gandhi and his followers to win over that new party to the Congress."

Gandhiji said he was surprised and pained to find that Shri Iyengar, an ex-judge, had spoken so irresponsibly as he had done. If he had taken the trouble of studying the movement, he would at once have seen that with him (Gandhiji) removal of untouchability was an article of faith before he knew anything of politics. If he had been guided by the political instead of the religious instinct, he would have excluded temple entry from the programme and confined his attention to the economic and the educational. But he had staked his popularity, such as it was, because he believed that without temple entry untouchability could not be said to have been abolished by Hinduism.

Gandhiji added : "I make an offer to Shri Iyengar and the other Sanatanists who say that they do not wish to ill-treat Harijans and would like to promote their economic and other temporal welfare. Let them join the Servants of Untouchables Society and finance and work its programme of temporal uplift and leave merely the temple entry to me and those who think with me. Shri Iyengar should know that that Society contains few Congressmen. The organization contains many prominent liberals.

Indeed Sanatanists can, if they mean what they say, by bringing money and workers to the Society, take charge of it and shape its policy. If this will not suit them, let them run a rival organization and spread its branches all over the country and win the hearts and gratitude of Harijans. I would take my chance of gaining religious merit by prosecuting the temple entry movement and showing that it will at a stroke uplift the Harijans and Caste Hindus, purify both, and automatically promote the temporal welfare of the former. Shri Iyengar should realize that in a matter concerning masses no 'stunt' can be of much use. They are open to be appealed to by everybody, and honesty and hard work can win in the end.

My Soul's Agony, (1933), 27-1-'33; pp. 142 & 143

56

FROM A TALK TO WOMEN

The only way in which we can expiate this sin of centuries is to befriend the Harijans by going to their quarters, by hugging their children as you do your own, by interesting yourselves in their welfare, by finding out whether they get enough to eat, whether they get pure water to drink, whether they have the fresh light and air that you enjoy as of right. The other way is for each of you to start the spinning sacrifice and to pledge yourselves to wear Khadi, which supports millions of these submerged human beings. The spinning sacrifice will help you in some slight measure to identify yourselves with them, and every yard of Khadi you wear will mean some coppers going into the pockets of the Harijans and the poor. The last thing is to contribute your mite to the Harijan Fund, which has no other end but the amelioration of the lot of the Harijans.

Harijan, 31-8-'34

SECTION SEVEN: INTERDINING AND INTERMARRIAGE

57

RELIGION DEGRADED

In the name of religion we Hindus have made a fetish of outward observances, and have degraded religion by making it simply a question of eating and drinking. Brahmanism owes its unrivalled position to its self-abnegation, its inward purity, its severe austerity, all these illumined by knowledge. Hindus are doomed if they attach undue importance to the spiritual effects of foods and human contacts. Placed as we are in the midst of trials and temptations from within, and touched and polluted as we are by all the most untouchable and the vilest thought currents, let us not, in our arrogance, exaggerate the influence of contact with people whom we often ignorantly and more often arrogantly consider to be our inferiors. Before the Throne of the Almighty we shall be judged, not by what we have eaten nor by whom we have been touched but by whom we have served and how. Inasmuch as we serve a single human being in distress, we shall find favour in the sight of God. Bad and stimulating or dirty foods we must avoid as we must avoid bad contact. But let us not give these observances a place out of all proportion to their importance. We dare not use abstinence from certain foods as a cover for fraud, hypocrisy and worse vices. We dare not refuse to serve a fallen or a dirty brother lest his contact should injure our spiritual growth.

Young India, 5-1-'22

58

LIMITATIONS OF THE MOVEMENT

Let us understand that this is not a question of interdining nor of intermarrying. Nor is it a question of abolition of Varnadharma mistranslated caste. It is a question purely and simply of removing untouchability, of abolishing the unwarranted fifth division. We have a school of reform that aims at a total abolition of the Varnadharma. This is not the place to examine the merits of the reform. The movement against untouchability restricts itself to removing the sinful superstition that mere touch of a person, because he is born in a particular group, is a pollution to be atoned for. The more the movement progresses in extent and intensity, the more urgent it becomes to understand and scrupulously to abide by its limitations. Thus whilst we challenge orthodoxy, we must assure it at the same time that we mean no more than we say. It must be enabled to understand the full scope of the movement. Letters I receive weekly show that the minimum has not always been kept steadily in view. The orthodox people have become naturally alarmed. It makes the reformer's task far more difficult than it need be.

Young India, 21-8-'24

59

RESTRICTIONS

I do not regard interdining and intermarriage as essential to the removal of untouchability. I believe in Varnashrama Dharma. But I eat with Bhangis. I do not know whether I am a Sannyasi for I seriously doubt whether in this Kaliyuga it is at all possible for any one to fulfil the conditions prescribed for a Sannyasi. But I am moving deliberately in the direction of Sannyas. It is, therefore, not only not necessary for me to observe these restrictions but their observance may be even harmful for me. As regards the question of intermarriage, it does not

arise in cases like mine. Sufficient for me to say that my scheme does not include intermarriage.

Let me tell you that in my own clan all the members do not interdine. In certain cases among our Vaishnava families they do not use each other's utensils or even cook food on fire fetched from others' kitchens. You may call this practice superstitious, but I do not regard it as such. It certainly does no harm to Hinduism. In my Ashram, Dudhabhai, one of the 'untouchable' inmates, dines with the rest without any distinction. But I do not recommend anybody outside the Ashram to follow this example. Again, you know the esteem in which I hold Malaviyaji. I would wash his feet. But he would not take food touched by me. Am I to resent it as a mark of contempt? Certainly not, because I know that no contempt is meant.

The religion to which I belong prescribes for our observance Maryada Dharma. The Rishis of old carried on exhaustive researches through meditation and as a result of the researches they discovered some great truths, such as have no parallel perhaps in any other religion. One of these was that they regarded certain kinds of foods as injurious for the spiritual wellbeing of man. So they interdicted their use. Now suppose some one had to travel abroad and live among strange people with different customs and standards as regards their diet. Knowing as they did how compelling sometimes the force of social customs of the people among whom men lived was, they promulgated Maryada Dharma to help one in such emergencies.

Though, however, I believe in Maryada Dharma, I do not regard it as an essential part of Hinduism. I can even conceive a time when these restrictions might be abolished with impunity. But the reform contemplated in the untouchability movement does not obliterate the restriction as to interdining and intermarrying. I cannot recommend wholesale abolition of these restrictions to the public, even at the risk of being charged with hypocrisy and inconsistency. For instance, I let my son dine freely in Musalman households because I believe he can take sufficient care as

to what to take and what not to take. I myself have no scruples in taking my food in Musalman households because I have my own strict rules about my diet. Let me tell you of an incident that happened at Aligarh. Swami Satyadev and I were Khwaja Saheb's guests. Swami Satyadev did not share my views. We argued about them. I told him that holding the views I did, it would be as wrong of me to refuse to partake of the food offered by a Musalman as it would be on his part to transgress his Maryada. So Swami Satyadev was provided with separate cooking arrangements. Similarly when I was Bari Saheb's guest, he provided us with a Brahmana cook with strict instructions to obtain all the rations for us fresh from the bazaar. When I asked why he put himself to such inconvenience he explained that he did so because he wanted to avoid the slightest possibility of suspicion on the part of the public that he entertained any secret designs of proselytization against me or my companions. That single incident raised Bari Saheb in my esteem.

Young India, 22-1-'25

60

INTERDINING

Personally I am not sure that interdining is a necessary reform. At the same time I recognize the tendency towards breaking down the restriction altogether. I can find reasons for and against the restriction. I would not force the pace. I do not regard it as a sin for a person not to dine with another nor do I regard it as sinful if one advocates and practises interdining. I should, however, resist the attempt to break down the restriction in disregard of the feelings of others. On the contrary I would respect their scruples in the matter.

Young India, 19-3-'25

61

A DIFFICULT PROBLEM

An Andhra correspondent invites attention to his difficulties as follows :

"In last week's *Young India* in one of your answers to a Bengal correspondent on untouchability you have stated thus: "Since 'we' do take water from the hands of Shudras we should not hesitate to accept it from the hands of untouchables," meaning by 'we' the high caste Hindus. I do not know the custom prevalent in Northern India. But are you aware of the fact that in Andhra as well as in still Southern parts of India Brahmanas do not only not take water from the hands of non-Brahmanas (of any of the other three castes) but the more orthodox of them observe strict untouchability with non-Brahmanas ?

"You have often said that you do not advocate interdining as essential to the removal of the present false notions of superiority of castes. You have quoted once an instance of Pandit Malaviyaji to bring out the fact that living as you are in mutual admiration and respect you could not think Malaviyaji meaning any contempt to you if he refused water or anything else from your hands. I agree there it might have meant no contempt. But you do not know that the Brahmanas of our part do not take food if seen by a non-Brahmana even if it be from a distance of hundred yards. Let alone the touching of it by him. May I also point out that a word or two escaping the mouth of a Shudra in a street is enough to rouse the orthodox Brahmana at meal to anger and he will go without meal the whole day ? In what way can these facts be interpreted if they can mean no contempt ? Has not the Brahmana put on an air of superiority ? Will you please enlighten me on these points ? I am myself a Brahmana youth and hence write with first-hand knowledge."

Untouchability is a hydra-headed monster. It is a deeply moral and religious question. Interdining, to me, is a social question. Behind the present untouchability there is undoubtedly and necessarily contempt for a portion of one's species. It is a canker that is eating into the vitals of society. It is a denial of the rights of man. It does not stand on a par with interdining. And I would strongly urge social reformers not to mix the two. If they do, they would injure the sacred cause of "the untouchables and the unapproachables". The Brahmana correspondent's difficulty

is real. It shows the length to which the evil has been carried. The name Brahmana should be, as it once was, a synonym for utter humility, self-effacement, sacrifice, purity, courage, forgiveness and true knowledge. But today this sacred land is cursed with divisions between Brahmanas and non-Brahmanas. In many instances the Brahmana has lost the superiority which he never claimed but which was his by right of service. He is now desperately striving to assert what he cannot claim and has therefore roused the jealousy of non-Brahmanas in some parts of India. Fortunately for Hinduism and fortunately for the country there are Brahmanas like the correspondent who are fighting with all their strength the tendency towards the ominous assertion and are serving the non-Brahmanas with a selfless pertinacity which is worthy of their high traditions. Everywhere one finds Brahmanas in the forefront fighting the evil of untouchability and supporting their brief with authorities from the scriptures. I urge the Southern Brahmana of the type mentioned by the Andhra correspondent to recognize the signs of the times and rid himself of false notions of superiority or of superstition that smells sin in the visible approach of a non-Brahmana or regards his dinner as polluted if he hears the voice of a non-Brahmana. The Brahmanas taught the world to see Brahman in everything. Surely then there can be no defilement from outside. It comes from within. Let the Brahmana redeliver the message that the 'untouchables' and the 'unapproachables' are the evil thoughts that one harbours. He taught the world to believe that 'man is truly his own deliverer as he is also his own defiler or captor.'

The non-Brahmana must not be ruffled by the things mentioned by the Andhra correspondent. Brahmanas like the Andhra correspondent will fight, as they are fighting, his battle. He must not, as I fear is the growing tendency, despise the whole race of Brahmanas because of the sins of a few. Let him be dignified enough not to claim right conduct towards himself from those who will misconduct themselves. I need not feel insulted because the passer-by

does not acknowledge me or because he feels polluted by my touch or presence or voice. It is enough that I refuse at his bidding to move from my path or to desist from speaking for fear of his hearing my voice. I may pity his ignorant assumption of superiority or his superstition but I may not get irritated and develop the contempt I would fain resent when directed towards myself. The non-Brahmana will lose his case by loss of self-restraint. Above all let him not, by overstepping the mark, embarrass his Brahmana champions. The Brahmana is the finest flower of Hinduism and humanity. I will do nothing to wither it. I know that it is well able to take care of itself. It has weathered many a storm before now. Only let it not be said of non-Brahmanas that they attempted to rob the flower of its fragrance and lustre. I would not have the non-Brahmanas to rise on the ruin of Brahmanas. I would rather that they rose to the height that the Brahmanas have occupied before now. Brahmanas are born, not so Brahmanism. It is a quality open to be cultivated by the lowliest or the lowest among us.

Young India, 19-3-'25

62

INTERDINING AGAIN

A correspondent writes :

"Suppose some men of goodwill organize, as one means of promoting goodwill amongst all classes, an intercaste, inter-communal and inter-national dinner on purely vegetarian and non-alcoholic lines ; would you from your own Sanatana point of view object, if any Hindus, say some members of your caste or of your own family, wished to join that dinner on invitation (and not of course on compulsion) and asked your opinion on it ? Similarly, may a Brahmana with *your* view of the Sanatana (or Maryada) Dharma accept a clean dish of rice and a pure cup of water which a Chandala or a Musalman or a Christian has offered him (and not of course forced on him) finding the Brahmana wayworn, hungry and thirsty (and almost on the point of fainting, let us say) in a lone wild place ? In fine the question is : Does such a demonstration of goodwill as the 'cosmopolitan' dinner or the offer of a dish by a supposed untouchable to a

touchable Hindu and acceptance thereof square with your idea of the Sanatana or Varnashrama Dharma or Maryada Dharma or does it not ?"

If a Brahmana is in distress he would take, if he wishes to hold on to his body, clean food by whomsoever offered. I would neither object to nor advocate participation in an international or cosmopolitan dinner, for the simple reason that such functions do not necessarily promote friendship or goodwill. It is possible today to organize a dinner party between Hindus and Musalmans but I dare to say that such a dinner will no more bring the two communities together than the absence of it keeps them apart. I have known deadly enemies dine and chat together heartily and yet remain enemies. Where will the correspondent draw the line ? Why does he stop at vegetarian and non-alcoholic meals ? A man who regards flesh-eating a virtue and wine bibbing a harmless and pleasurable refreshment, will see nothing but promotion of goodwill in dividing with the world his beef steak and exchanging with it the sparkling cup. On the argument underlying the correspondent's query, there can be no dividing line. I therefore rule out interdining as the means of promoting goodwill. Whilst I do not myself observe these restrictions and take food that I do not regard as forbidden at the hands of anyone so long as it is cleanly dressed, I respect the scruples of those who observe the restrictions. Nor do I pat myself on the back for my 'liberal' practice as against the others' 'narrowness'. I may be narrow and selfish inspite of my apparently liberal practice and my friend may be liberal and unselfish notwithstanding his apparently narrow practice. Merit or demerit lies in the motive. Insistence upon interdining as part of the programme of promotion of fellowship, in my opinion, retards the growth of goodwill by raising false issues and even false hope. What I am trying to remove is the idea of pollution and superiority. These self-imposed restrictions have a sanitary as also a spiritual value. But non-observance no more dooms a man to perdition than its observance raises him to the seventh heaven. A man who observes the dining

restrictions in a most punctilious manner may be a veritable blackguard fit to be shunned by society, and a cosmopolitan omnivorous man may be one ever walking in the fear of God whose society it would be a privilege to cultivate.

Young India, 30-4-'25

63

INCONSISTENCIES

A correspondent who is a diligent student of my writings finds it difficult to reconcile my recent writings about inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage and corresponding writings of some years ago.

He quotes from my article on 'Hinduism' contributed to *Young India* of 6th October 1921. I give the quotation below with his omissions :

"Though, therefore, Varnashrama is not affected by interdining and intermarriage, Hinduism does most emphatically discourage interdining and intermarriage between divisions. Hinduism reached the highest limit of self-restraint. It is undoubtedly a religion of renunciation of the flesh, so that the spirit may be set free. . . . By restricting his choice of a bride to a particular group, he exercises rare self-restraint. . . . Prohibition against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul."

And then he quotes from my statement dated the 4th November last year, which was circulated to the Press. I give the quotation again with his omissions :

"Restrictions on inter-caste dining and inter-caste marriage is no part of Hindu religion. It is a social custom which crept into Hinduism when perhaps it was in its decline. . . . Today these two prohibitions are weakening Hindu society, and emphasis on them has turned the attention of the mass mind from the fundamentals which are vital to life's growth. . . . Dining and marriage restrictions stunt Hindu society."

As I read them with a detached mind, I find no contradiction between the two statements, especially if they are read in their full context. In the statement of 1921, I wrote on Hinduism and gave the briefest outline of it. On the 4th November, I had to apply myself to the innumerable castes and caste restrictions. The mode of life in the Ashram in 1921 was absolutely the same as it is now. Therefore my practice has undergone no change. I still believe that restriction imposed by oneself upon interdining and intermarriage is an act of renunciation of the flesh. There is one word that perhaps I would change if I was writing the article of 1921 today. Instead of 'Prohibition', I should repeat the expression used in the same article just a few lines before and say, 'self-imposed restriction against intermarriage and interdining is essential for a rapid evolution of the soul.'

In spite of my statement of the 4th November last, I would say that interdining and inter-caste marriage are in no way essential for the promotion of the spirit of brotherhood or for the removal of untouchability. At the same time, a super-imposed restriction would undoubtedly stunt the growth of any society.

But having said this, I would like to say to this diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and, therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

Harijan, 29-4-'33

64

INTERDINING AND INTERMARRIAGE

Are interdining and intermarriage necessary for the removal of untouchability ?

My answer is, no and yes. 'No', because it is no part of the programme of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Generally, too, marrying and dining are matters of individual concern. No one has a right to ask another to choose a girl for wife or to dine with anybody against his will. But my answer is at the same time 'yes', because if a person refuses to take food touched by another person on the ground of untouchability or inferiority, he is observing untouchability. In other words, untouchability cannot constitute any ground for restraint on interdining or marriage.

Harijan, 23-3-'34

65

INTERDINING AND INTERMARRIAGE AGAIN

[With reference to a question from a correspondent, Gandhiji wrote :]

Restraint upon interdining is no part of Varna Dharma ; but I do not understand why interdining retards the evolution of the soul. Here there is a double confusion. In the first instance, restraint upon interdining on the ground of untouchability is wholly different from the restraint based on the ground of the evolution of the soul. The first restraint excludes a whole class whose very existence is challenged, the second excludes nobody on the ground of his birth in a particular class, but it may exclude those individuals who are addicted to particular habits. Thus, restraint on the ground of untouchability will persist without reference to the person's habits, while that on the ground of evolution of the soul will abate immediately the person excluded sheds his objectionable habits. There is, therefore, no inconsistency between the *Young India* writing referred to and my present position.

Harijan, 13-4-'34

CASTE HAS TO GO

The present caste system is the very antithesis of Varnashrama. The sooner public opinion abolishes it the better.

In Varnashrama there was and should be no prohibition of intermarriage or interdining. Prohibition there is of change of one's hereditary occupation for purposes of gain. The existing practice is therefore doubly wrong in that it has set up cruel restrictions about interdining and intermarriage and tolerates anarchy about choice of occupation.

Though there is in Varnashrama no prohibition against intermarriage and interdining, there can be no compulsion. It must be left to the unfettered choice of the individual as to where he or she will marry or dine. If the law of Varnashrama was observed there would naturally be a tendency, so far as marriage is concerned, for people to restrict the marital relations to their own Varna.

The most effective, quickest, and the most unobtrusive way to destroy caste is for reformers to begin the practice with themselves and where necessary take the consequences of social boycott. The reform will not come by reviling the orthodox. The change will be gradual and imperceptible. The so-called higher classes will have to descend from their pedestal before they can make any impression upon the so-called lower classes. Day-to-day experience of village work shows how difficult the task is of bridging the gulf that exists between the city-dwellers and the villagers, the higher classes and the lower classes.

Harijan, 16-11-'35

The views expressed by me in the article "Caste Has to Go" have been often expressed in these columns though under different headings. Moreover, the article does not deal with the relations between Caste Hindus and Harijan Hindus. It deals with reform only among Castemen or

Savarnas. When untouchability goes, 'untouchables' will occupy precisely the same position as Castemen. And whatever rule or custom then governs Castemen will govern Harijans who are no longer Harijans. If, therefore, caste remains as it is now, there will be no intermarriage and no interdining between Harijans and Castemen. But if caste goes in its present form, as it will some day, there will most undoubtedly be intermarriage and interdining between Harijans and Castemen as there will be between Castemen and Castemen. And if Varna remains, as I hope it will, occupations will be restricted as they were in the past, intermarriage and interdining will not be restricted even as they were not in the past. Whatever happens, it will happen not because of the activity of the Harijan Sevak Sangh as a body but because of other forces which the Sangh can neither regulate nor control. Its members as individuals will no doubt take their due share in moulding those forces according to their predilections.

Harijan, 30-11-'35

67

INTERDINING

Q. Can the members of the Harijan Sevak Sangh refuse to interdine with 'untouchables'? Have your views on this question undergone any change?

A. At one time I did say that interdining was not an essential part of the campaign for the removal of untouchability. Personally, I was for it. Today I encourage it. In fact, today I even go further.

Harijan, 28-7-'46

68

MARRIAGES BETWEEN HARIJANS AND NON-HARIJANS

A friend from Patidar Ashram, Surat, writes to Shri Narhari Parikh :

"In India the movement for removal of untouchability has received great impetus since Gandhiji's entry into politics. If he can find an educated Harijan girl to marry a Caste Hindu it will help the movement in a way. But the question should be considered from another aspect also. Our country is still backward in female education and amongst Harijans who are backward in every way, educated girls can be counted on the fingers of one's hand. If they marry Caste Hindus they will, as a rule, be cut off from their own society and absorbed by the Caste Hindus. They will not be able to work for the uplift of their Harijan sisters from within. I know of one or two such instances.

"One might say that in a way such marriages help to keep the Harijans in ignorance. The progress of a community depends on the progress of its women. By giving away the best of their womanhood to the Caste Hindus, Bapu will be closing the door on the Harijans getting out of the blackest ignorance in which they are today steeped. I think this should be stopped. If Harijan girls are to marry Caste Hindus it should be on condition that the couple will devote their lives to the service of the Harijans. Otherwise, educated Harijan girls should be encouraged to marry educated youths in their own community. If they are educated in the real sense of the term they will set an example to their community to emulate and follow.

"You must be knowing that in our Ashram, Harijan and non-Harijan students live together without any distinction whatsoever. Parikshitlal sends to us one or two Harijan students every year. This year we had two. One of them said to me : 'Why does not Bapu encourage the marriage of educated Caste Hindu girls with educated Harijan boys ? This is what he should really encourage. If Caste Hindu girls live amongst Harijans as Harijans, Harijan sisters will be able to learn a lot from them and Harijan uplift work will receive great impetus.' I could answer the question but I would rather that Bapu did so himself. It deserves serious thought."

If an educated Harijan girl marries a Caste Hindu the couple ought to devote themselves to the service of Harijans. Self-indulgence can never be the object of such a marriage. That will be improper. I can never encourage it. It is possible that a marriage entered into with the best of intentions turns out to be a failure. No one can prevent such mishaps. Even if one Harijan girl marries a Caste Hindu with a high character it will do good to both the Harijans and Caste Hindus. They will set up a good precedent and if the Harijan girl is really worthy, she will spread her fragrance far and wide and encourage others to copy her example. Society will cease to be scared by such marriages. They will see for themselves that there is nothing wrong in them. If children born of such a union turn out to be good, they will further help to remove untouchability. Every reform moves at the proverbial snail's pace. To be dissatisfied with this slowness of progress betrays ignorance of the way in which reform works.

It is certainly desirable that Caste Hindu girls should select Harijan husbands. I hesitate to say that it is better. That would imply that women are inferior to men. I know that such inferiority complex is there today. For this reason I would agree that at present the marriage of a Caste Hindu girl to a Harijan is better than that of a Harijan girl to a Caste Hindu. If I had my way I would persuade all Caste Hindu girls coming under my influence to select Harijan husbands. That it is most difficult I know from experience. Old prejudices are difficult to shed. One cannot afford to laugh at such prejudices either. They have to be overcome with patience. And if a girl imagines that her duty ends by marrying a Harijan and falls a prey to the temptation of self-indulgence after marriage, the last state would be worse than the first. The final test of every marriage is how far it develops the spirit of service in the parties. Every mixed marriage will tend in varying degrees to remove the stigma attached to such marriages. Finally there will be only one caste, known by the beautiful name Bhangi, that is to say, the reformer or remover of all dirt. Let us all pray that such a happy day will dawn soon.

The correspondent must realize that even the best of my wishes cannot come true on the mere expression. I have not succeeded in marrying off a single Harijan girl to a Caste Hindu so far after my declaration. I have a Caste Hindu girl who at her father's wish has offered to marry a Harijan lad of her father's selection. The lad is at present under training at Sevagram. God willing, the marriage will take place after a short time.

Harijan, 7-7-'46

SECTION EIGHT: TEMPLE-ENTRY

69

TO CORRESPONDENTS

I advised the cultured 'untouchables' of Travancore that they might singly demand entrance to temples if they could exercise restraint and stand insults from the keepers without seeking the assistance of courts of law. My advice to 'untouchables' generally is not to test the right of entry into temples whilst the evil of untouchability is otherwise still in existence. In no case have I advised entry into sanctuaries. In theory I do claim custodians of Hindu temples should throw open to 'untouchables' those parts which are open to other classes.

Young India, 8-12-'21

70

THE CRIME OF CASTE

An extraordinary case that was tried in a Madras Presidency court brings vividly to light the sad plight of our suppressed countrymen. A simple cleanly dressed Panchama entered a temple in a perfectly devotional spirit without the slightest intention of hurting anybody's feeling or insulting any religion. He had been in the habit of paying his respects at this temple every year though he did not enter it. But last year in his ecstatic mood he forgot himself and entered the temple. The priest in charge could not distinguish him from the others and therefore accepted his offering. But when he regained self-possession, he was terrified to find himself in a prohibited place and ran away from the temple. But some who knew him caught him and handed him to the Police. The temple authorities when they discovered the crime, had the temple

duly purified. Then followed a trial. A Hindu Magistrate convicted him and imposed a fine of Rs 75 or one month's rigorous imprisonment for insulting his own religion! An appeal was filed. There was an elaborate argument over it. Judgment had to be reserved! And when conviction was set aside, it was not because the court held that the poor Panchama had a right to enter the temple but because the prosecution in the lower court had forgotten to prove the insult. This is no triumph of justice or truth or religion or morality.

The only consolation to be derived from the successful appeal is the Panchama will not have to suffer imprisonment for having in his zeal for worship forgotten that he was a prohibited entrant. If however he or his fellow-Panchamas again dare to enter the temple, it is highly probable that they would be severely punished if they are not lynched by those who look down upon them with contempt.

It is a curious situation. We resent, and properly, the treatment meted out to our countrymen in South Africa. We are impatient to establish Swaraj. But we Hindus refuse to see the incongruity in treating a fifth of our own co-religionists as worse than dogs. For dogs are not untouchables. Some of us nowadays even keep them as drawing-room pets.

Much has no doubt been done to remove this evil. But it is all too little so long as criminal prosecutions for temple entry are possible and so long as the suppressed classes continue to be denied the right of entering temples, using public wells, and sending their children freely to national schools. We must yield to them the same rights as we would have the Europeans concede to our countrymen in South Africa.

But this case is not without its relieving features. The quashing of the conviction is no doubt some consolation. But the best consolation lies in the fact of so many Savarna Hindus actively interesting themselves in the poor Panchama's behalf. The appeal would not have been noted if some one had not gone to the accused's assistance. It is

to be wished that every educated Hindu will constitute himself the 'untouchable's' friend and regard it his duty to free him from the tyranny of custom masquerading under the name of religion. Not the entry of a Panchama into a temple but the brand of prohibition against him is an insult to religion and humanity.

Young India, 14-1-'26

71

STILL SHIRKING THE ISSUE

Another case like the one discussed in these pages recently * has been decided in the South with reference to the vexed question of temple entry by the so-called untouchables. One Murugesan, a *Mala* by caste, was tried before the Stationary Sub-Magistrate of Tirupathi for having ventured to enter a temple at Tiruchanur for the purpose of offering worship. The Lower Court regarded this entry as 'defilement with intent to insult the religion of a class' under Section 295 of I.P.C. and fined the accused Rs. 75/- or in default rigorous imprisonment for one month. Fortunately for the poor outcaste there were reformers who were interested in him. The case went in appeal. The appellate court sustained the appeal.

Again the prosecutors, the judges and the deliverers of the poor despised men were his co-religionists — Hindus. Again the accused was happily saved from rigorous imprisonment (he could not pay the exorbitant fine, I presume) but again the cause remains undecided. It was open to the Hindu judge to say that the entry into a Hindu temple by a Panchama Hindu with the object of offering worship could not by any stretch of the meaning of the word 'insult' constitute an insult to the Hindu religion to which the accused claimed and was admitted to belong. It may have been improper in the estimation of some Hindus for the accused to enter the temple, it may have been contrary

* See the previous article.

to custom, it may have been a hundred other things, but it was not an insult to the religion of any class such as to amount to a crime under the Indian Penal Code. It is worthy of note that the accused bore no visible marks of his despised birth. He was 'dressed properly and wearing marks of piety'. Indeed if these persecuted men choose to practise deception, it would be impossible to distinguish them from the rest. It is simple fanatical obstinacy to persist in persecuting men in the sacred name of religion. It is the persecutors who are unknowingly defiling their own religion by keeping out of public temples men who are at least as honourable as they claim to be themselves and are willing to abide by all the ceremonial rules observable by Hindus in general on such occasions. More than that no man has any right to impose or expect. The heart of man only God knows. An ill-dressed Panchama may have a much cleaner heart than a meticulously dressed high-caste Hindu.

Young India, 11-3-'26

72

TEMPLES FOR 'UNTOUCHABLES'

In the beginning of the movement as I had conceived it on my return from South Africa in 1915, I had thought that it was wholly inconsistent with the movement for removing untouchability to build separate temples or schools for them. But experience taught me that the movement could not proceed upon strict logic, and that we Hindus had so much suppressed a third of ourselves that even after the articulate Hindus had with one voice declared for removal, the suppressed brethren would for a long time need the helping hand in a variety of ways. After the theoretical, lip-removal of untouchability, if no special effort was made, the vast bulk of them would not readily take advantage of the removal and the ignorant mass would not tolerate them especially when the latter would be naturally clumsy in their deportment or pardonably forward in the enjoyment of long withheld freedom. I am

therefore convinced that the two things will have to go hand in hand — perfect freedom to enter ordinary temples and ordinary schools and to use common wells, at the same time as erection of model schools and model temples specially designed for the convenience of 'untouchables' but open to the others subject always to priority for 'untouchables'. It was along this line of reasoning that I suggested in the brief note for the *Calcutta Municipal Gazette* that the Municipalities could foster removal of untouchability by erecting temples and model schools for the suppressed classes side by side with the attempt to have the existing temples thrown open to these countrymen of ours. My note may therefore on no account be taken as an excuse for condoning prohibition against entry into temples etc.

Young India, 28-11-'29

73

A COMPROMISE

[In the course of an interview given to an Associated Press correspondent on 2nd January 1933, Gandhiji gave the details of a suggestion he had made to Pandit Panchanana Tarkaratna, of orthodox leanings, by way of a compromise in the matter of the Guruvayur temple entry question.]

The suggestion I made was this. During certain hours of the day, the temple should be thrown open to Harijans and to other Hindus who have no objection to the presence of Harijans, and during certain other hours it should be reserved for those who have scruples against the entry of Harijans. There should be no difficulty whatsoever in accepting the suggestion, seeing that in connection with the Krithikai Ekadashi festival at Guruvayur, Harijans are allowed to enter side by side with other Hindus and then the idol of the temple undergoes purification.

Asked if his suggestion was that the temple might undergo purification daily after the entry of the Harijans, Gandhiji replied: "Personally, I am opposed to purification at all. But if that would satisfy the conscience of

the objectors, I would personally raise no objections to purification. If purification has any value, then there are so many possibilities of daily defilement from a variety of causes referred to in the various texts, that there should be a daily purification, whether Harijans are allowed to enter or not."

Asked if the compromise suggested by him did not still maintain a distinction between Harijans and 'high castes', Gandhiji replied that the Harijan's attitude should be this: "If there is a person who objects to my presence, I would like to respect his objection, so long as he (the objector) does not deprive me of the right that belongs to me. So long as I am permitted to have a legitimate share of the day for offering worship side by side with those who have no objection to my presence, I would be satisfied."

Gandhiji proceeded to say that in a place where the majority of people favoured temple entry by Harijans, the number of Caste Hindus, who would want the temple exclusively for them during certain hours, would be so small as to be negligible.

My Soul's Agony (1933); pp. 114-15

74

TEMPLE-ENTRY

This movement against untouchability has been daily gathering strength. It was in last September that leading Hindus, claiming to represent the whole of Hindu India, met together and unanimously passed a resolution, condemning untouchability and pledging themselves to abolish it by law, if possible even during the existing regime, and, failing that, when India had a Parliament of her own.

Among the marks of untouchability to be removed was the prohibition against temple-entry by Harijans. In the course of the struggle, it was discovered that the

British Courts in India had recognized this evil custom, so much so that certain acts done by 'untouchables' as such came to be offences under the British India Penal Code. Thus, the entry by an 'untouchable' into a Hindu temple would be punishable as a crime under the I. P. C.

Before, therefore, the movement of temple-entry can make headway, it has become imperative to have this anomaly removed. It is for this purpose that Shri Ranga Iyer has given notice of two bills to be introduced in the Central Legislature.

With due regard to the Sanatanists, it is difficult to understand the cry of 'religion in danger'. Under neither bill will a single temple be opened against the will of the majority of temple-goers in question. The second bill expressly says so. The first bill takes up a neutral attitude. It does not help a Harijan to force his way into a temple. The reformers do not seek to compel the opponents to their will. They desire, by the fairest means possible, to convert the majority or the minority, as the case may be, to their view of untouchability.

It is said that the Harijans themselves do not want temple-entry and that they want only betterment of their economic and political condition. The reformer, too, wants the latter, but he believes that this betterment will be much quicker brought about, if religious equality is attained. The reformer denies that the Harijans do not want temple-entry. But it may be that they are so disgusted with Caste Hindus and Hindu religion itself as to want nothing from them. They may in sullen discontent choose to remain outside the religious pale. Any penance on the part of Caste Hindus may be too late.

Nevertheless, the Caste Hindus who recognize that untouchability is a blot on Hinduism have to atone for the sin of untouchability. Whether, therefore, Harijans desire temple-entry or not, Caste Hindus have to open their temples to Harijans, precisely on the same terms as to other Hindus. For a Caste Hindu with any sense of honour, temple prohibition is a continuous breach of the pledge

taken at the Bombay meeting of September last. These, who gave their word to the world and to God that they would have the temples opened for the Harijans, have to sacrifice their all, if need be, for redeeming the pledge. Temple-entry is the one spiritual act that would constitute the message of freedom to the 'untouchables' and assure them that they are not outcastes before God.

Harijan, 11-2-'33

75

AN IMPATIENT WORKER

An earnest but impatient worker has been trying to have temples and public places thrown open to Harijans. He had some success but nothing to be proud of. In his impatience, therefore, he writes :

> "It is no use waiting for these orthodox men to make a beginning. They will never move unless compelled to do so. Drastic steps are required to wipe off untouchability. I therefore beg you to kindly favour me with your opinion if Satyagraha at the entrance of the temples, by workers and Harijans preventing orthodox persons from entering the temples will be an effective method. Appeals and entreaties have produced no effect, and to lose more time on these will, in my humble opinion, be sheer waste of valuable time."

Such blocking the way will be sheer compulsion. And there should be no compulsion in religion or in matters of any reform. The movement for the removal of untouchability is one of self-purification. No man can be purified against his will. Therefore, there can be no force directly or indirectly used against the orthodox. It should be remembered that many of us were like the orthodox people before our recognition of the necessity of the removal of untouchability. We would not then have liked anybody to block our way to the temples, because we in those days believed, no doubt wrongly as we now think, that Harijans should not be allowed to enter temples. Even so may we not block the way of the orthodox to the temples.

I should also remind correspondents that the word 'Satyagraha' is often most loosely used and is made to cover veiled violence. But as the author of the word I may be allowed to say that it excludes every form of violence, direct or indirect, veiled or unveiled, and whether in thought, word or deed. It is breach of Satyagraha to wish ill to an opponent or to say a harsh word to him or of him with the intention of harming him. And often the evil thought or the evil word may, in terms of Satyagraha, be more dangerous than actual violence used in the heat of the moment and perhaps repented and forgotten the next moment. Satyagraha is gentle, it never wounds. It must not be the result of anger or malice. It is never fussy, never impatient, never vociferous. It is the direct opposite of compulsion. It was conceived as a complete substitute for violence.

Nevertheless, I fully agree with the correspondent that 'most drastic steps are required to wipe off untouchability'. But these steps have to be taken against ourselves. The orthodox people sincerely believe that untouchability, as they practise it, is enjoined by the Shastras and that great evil will befall them and Hinduism if it was removed. How is one to cope with this belief? It is clear that they will never change their belief by being compelled to admit Harijans to their temples. What is required is not so much the entry of Harijans to the temples as the conversion of the orthodox to the belief that it is wrong to prevent Harijans from entering the temples. This conversion can only be brought about by an appeal to their heart, i.e., by evoking the best that is in them. Such an appeal can be made by the appellants' prayers, fasting and other suffering in their own persons, in other words, by their ever-increasing purity. It has never yet been known to fail. For it is its own end. The reformer must have consciousness of the truth of his cause. He will not then be impatient with the opponent, he will be impatient with himself. He must be prepared even to fast unto death. Not every one has the right or the capacity to do so. God is most exacting. He exacts humility from his votaries. Even fasts may take

the form of coercion. But there is nothing in the world that in human hands does not lend itself to abuse. The human being is a mixture of good and evil, Jekyll and Hyde. But there is the least likelihood of abuse when it is a matter of self-suffering.

Harijan, 15-4-'33

76

TEMPLE WORSHIP

My memory revives the scenes of my childhood when I used daily to visit the Ramji Mandir adjacent to my ancestral home. My Rama then resided there. He saved me from many fears and sins. It was no superstition for me. The custodian of the idol may have been a bad man. I knew nothing against him. Misdeeds might have gone on in the temple. Again I knew nothing of them. Therefore, they would not affect me. What was and is true of me is true of millions of Hindus. I want my Harijan brother, if he wishes, to share this temple worship with the millions of his co-religionists the so-called Caste men. It is the latter's duty to throw open their temples to their Harijan brethren. Temple worship supplies the felt spiritual want of the human race. It admits of reform. But it will live as long as man lives.

Harijan, 18-3-'33

77

TEMPLE REFORM

Several correspondents have taken me to task for advocating temple entry for Harijans without emphasizing the necessity of temple reform. There is no doubt that temple reform is necessary. But here, again, there is need for caution. Some of them think that it is possible to replace all the existing temples with new ones. I do not share that view. All temples will never be alike. They will always vary, as they have done in the past, with the varying human needs. What the reformer should be concerned with is a radical change more in the inward spirit than in the outward form. If the first is changed, the second will take care of itself. If the first remains unchanged, the second, no matter how radically changed, will be like a whited sepulchre. A mausoleum, however beautiful, is a tomb and not a mosque, and a bare plot of consecrated ground may be a real Temple of God.

Therefore the first desideratum is the priest. My ideal priest must be a man of God. He must be a true servant of the people. He should have the qualifications of a guide, friend and philosopher to those among whom he is officiating. He must be a whole-timer with the least possible needs and personal ties. He should be versed in the Shastras. His whole concern will be to look after the welfare of his people. I have not drawn a fanciful picture. It is almost true to life. It is based on the recollections of my childhood. The priest I am recalling was looked up to by the prince and the people. They flocked round him for advice and guidance in the time of their need.

If the sceptic says such a priest is hard to find nowadays, he would be partly right. But I would ask the reformer to wait for building the temple of his ideal till he finds his priest.

Meanwhile let him cultivate in himself the virtues he will have in the priest of his imagination. Let him expect

these from the priests of existing temples. In other words, by his gentle and correct conduct, let him infect his immediate surroundings with the need of the times and let him have faith that his thought, surcharged with his own correct conduct, will act more powerfully than the mightiest dynamo. Let him not be impatient to see the result in a day. A thought may take years of conduct to evolve the requisite power. What are years or generations in the life of a great reform? The existing temples can become real Houses of God today, if the worshippers will insist on the priests conforming to the ideal presented by me.

Harijan, 29-4-'33

78

ANIMAL SACRIFICE

It is a serious question whether, where the priests exploit the superstition of the people and where innocent birds and animals are offered as sacrifice, it is right to agitate for the entry of Harijans to such a temple.

No doubt temple reform is a separate question. Entry of Harijans into temples cannot await reform. But I would draw the line at temples where animal sacrifices are offered. I would not touch these temples till animal sacrifices are stopped. Inward corruption in temples cannot affect the devotee who knows nothing about it. But with animal sacrifice every worshipper is intimately connected. For, he or she has to offer such sacrifice. And a Harijan admitted for the first time in such a temple would naturally be expected to bring some poor bird or animal as sacrifice. He may or may not be a meat-eater, but who will make himself responsible for the sin of teaching an unsophisticated Harijan that God expects His worshippers to propitiate Him with the blood of innocent dumb animals who have never sinned, who have no sense of sin?

Harijan, 5-4-'35

79

TEMPLE-ENTRY

However much I may deplore that this great temple of Shrirangam is not open to Harijans precisely in the same manner as to Caste Hindus, I have absolutely no desire that the temple should be opened to Harijans, until Caste Hindu opinion is ripe for the opening. It is not a question of Harijans asserting their right of temple-entry or claiming it. They may or may not want to enter that temple even when it is declared open to them. But it is the bounden duty of every Caste Hindu to secure that opening for Harijans. But it cannot be opened because a humble individual like me thinks that it should be opened. It can only be opened when there is a general concensus of opinion on the part of Caste Hindus.

[From a speech at Shrirangam]
Harijan, 23-2-'34

80

TEMPLE-ENTRY *vs.* ECONOMIC UPLIFT

One sees sometimes in the public Press criticism on the temple-entry question. It is double barrelled, being directed on the one hand by Harijans and on the other by Sanatanists. Some of the Harijans say, ' We do not want temple-entry ; do not build temples, but use all you receive for economic uplift.' Some Sanatanists say, ' Give up the temple-entry question altogether. You are hurting our feelings by forcing Harijans into temples.' Both are wrong in substance. Not one single pice out of the purse has been or will be spent for building temples. Attempt is being made only to have public temples opened to Harijans on the same terms on which they are open to the other Hindus. It is a matter of choice for the Harijans to visit or not to visit them. Savarna Hindus have to lift the bar

against Harijans. For those millions who regard temples as treasure chests of spiritual wealth, they are living realities which they hold dear as life itself. If they are truly repentant towards Harijans, they must share these treasures with the latter. I know what the opening of temples means to Harijans. Only last week, between Dharwad and Belgaum, I opened three temples to Harijans in the presence of crowds of Savarna Hindus and Harijans. If critics had been present at the opening and noticed the pleasure on the countenances of the Harijans present as they bowed before the image and received the *prasad*, their criticism would have been silenced. Harijan critics would have realized that, apart from themselves, Harijans at large did desire temple-entry. Sanatanist critics would have realized that temples, wherever they were opened, were being opened with the fullest concurrence of the temple-goers concerned and in the presence of crowds of them. No hole-and-corner opening can do any good whatsoever to Hinduism. To be of spiritual or any value at all, the opening has to be performed with due publicity, solemnity and the willing consent of the existing temple-goers, and not of such self-styled reformers as have no faith or interest in temples and for whom temples may even be a superstition. Temple-entry agitation requires no financial outlay, it does not lend itself to agitation except by a few workers who have faith in temples and whose word would command attention from the mass Savarna mind. It is, therefore, a question that can only be and is being gently and cautiously handled. The only insistence is on the right and the duty of the believing reformer advocating temple-entry and showing that without it the reformation will not only be incomplete but fruitless. For, without temples being freely open to Harijans, untouchability could not be said to have been removed root and branch.

As for the economic uplift, it is altogether wrong to put it in opposition to temple-entry. Temple-entry can only help such uplift. For, when Harijans are freely admitted to temples, all the avenues to economic betterment must be automatically open to Harijans as to others. So far as the

moneys received are concerned, they will all be used only for economic uplift, if it is admitted that educational uplift also means economic, in that it makes the educated Harijan fitter for running life's race.

Harijan, 16-3-'34

81

TEMPLE-ENTRY BILL

In the course of my tour, I have had the privilege of declaring open many temples amidst the acclamations of thousands of people, practically without a dissentient voice. In the single instance where there was an appreciable minority against the opening, I refused to open the temple till the minority was won over or it had at least ample time to act upon the majority. If I discovered that a single temple was opened without such consent or by compulsion in any form, I should move heaven and earth to have the temple re-closed to Harijans. Then take the Temple-Entry Bill. I may be allowed to say that the Temple-Entry Bill or an equivalent is absolutely necessary if the will of the majority is to prevail. Today, according to legal opinion, even one dissentient voice is enough to keep a temple closed to Harijans. But I would be no party even to such enabling legislation being passed, if there is not a clear majority of Caste Hindus in favour of it.

Harijan, 4-5-'34

TEMPLE-ENTRY

The local Harijan Sevak Sanghs should make a sustained effort to have the existing temples thrown open and even to build new ones, not for Harijans only but for all. If they are situated in healthy localities and have a school, a meeting place and a Dharmashala attached to them, they must prove useful and popular among all classes of Hindus. There may be public prayers held there every evening or at stated periods and religious discourses may be occasionally arranged. If these temples are properly conducted, they would go a long way towards removing the prejudice against the opening of existing temples to Harijans. Care must be taken, where temples are opened to Harijans, that no discrimination is made against them. They must be opened on precisely the same terms as they are opened to the other Hindus.

It is hardly necessary to state that in different localities different methods may be adopted for securing the desired end. Perfect non-violence must of course be maintained in all classes. An all-India simultaneous movement of the same type is not contemplated. It will vary in intensity and method according to the circumstances in each locality. Nowhere should temples be opened where there is an active minority opposed to the opening. Practical unanimity should be secured before any temple is opened. Thus what is required is sustained effort to convert local public opinion in favour of temple-entry.

Harijan, 28-3-'36

83

TO HARIJAN WORKERS

You will begin by taking the Harijans along with you to the temple if you are in the habit of going to a temple. But if you discover that you will not be allowed into the temple along with your Harijan companions, then if you have the living belief that I have that untouchability is wrong, you will shun that temple as you shun a scorpion or fire. You will then believe with me that such a temple is not inhabited by God. I will take by way of illustration the greatest temple known all over the world, viz. Kashi Vishwanath in Banaras. The Lord who is supposed to reside there is known as the Lord of the Universe. And yet in the very name of that Vishwanath the Savarna Hindus have today the impudence to say to the Harijans, 'You shall not come to this temple!'

I claim to be as good a Hindu as any orthodox Hindu. I have endeavoured to enforce all precepts of Hinduism in my own life to the best of my ability. I admit that my ability is small. But that does not affect my attitude to and love for Hinduism. Yet, in spite of all that love for Hinduism, with a due sense of my own responsibility, I am here to tell you that so long as the doors of the Banaras Temple are closed against a single Harijan, Kashi Vishwanath does not reside in that temple, and I could not possibly approach that temple with a belief in its sanctity, or in the fact that by worshipping there, I should be purified of my sins. I can have no sense of piety in respect of such a temple. And what is true of Kashi Vishwanath is true of every other temple in India which bars its doors to Harijans.

If it was demonstrated to me to my satisfaction that the political or economic regeneration of Harijans would be enough to retain the Harijans in the Hindu fold, I should still want to open the temples and remove every trace of inequality, because for me it is, as it must be for you, a

question of repentance and reparation for the wrong we have done to our fellowmen.

[From a speech at the Kengeri Conference]
Harijan, 20-6-'36

84

AN EXAMPLE FOR HINDU PRINCES

The Travancore Durbar have earned the congratulations of the whole Hindu world, and all thoughtful men, by issuing the following Proclamation :

"Profoundly convinced of the truth and validity of our religion, believing that it is based on divine guidance and on all-comprehending toleration, knowing that in its practice it has throughout the centuries adapted itself to the need of the changing times, solicitous that none of our Hindu subjects should by reason of birth, caste or community be denied the consolation and solace of the Hindu faith, we have decided and hereby declare, ordain and command that, subject to such rules and conditions as may be laid down and imposed by us for preserving their proper atmosphere and maintaining their rituals and observances, there should henceforth be no restriction placed on any Hindu by birth or religion on entering or worshipping at temples controlled by us and our Government."

If the Proclamation means anything it means that in the temples conducted under the State aegis Harijans will offer worship precisely on the same terms as the highest Caste Hindu so-called. In other words, in the house of God in Travancore henceforth there will be no distinction between man and man, there will be no Harijan and no high caste, all will be Harijans — children of God. If these are not the implications of the great Proclamation, it is nothing but a mere scrap of paper. But we have no reason to doubt its sincerity or suspect any mental reservations.

The Proclamation should have no political significance, as it has none. I regard it as the performance of a purely religious duty of the State. And it should be so taken and so treated by all the Hindus of the State. To give it any other colour will be to destroy its great spiritual purpose and effect.

Let us hope that the example of Travancore will prove infectious and all the other Hindu States will follow suit. There is no reason why they should not. It is the privilege and duty of a Hindu prince to propound religious codes which are not inconsistent with the fundamental principles of Hinduism as derived from the Vedas and which are demanded by the spirit of the times. This must be true of all the progressive and living religions. This rule accounts for apparent inconsistencies of the different Smritis and also obvious departures from the original tenets, as even a careless student will detect even in the Smriti. If the Hindu princes do not perform this primary function, it is not so much their fault as of the lost Brahmanahood. If the Brahmanical spirit was restored, princes would be Rishis, who would take from the revenues the honest minimum necessary to support them as a commission for their labours on behalf of the ryots, and hold their revenues in trust for the ryots. They would not have private property as they possess today and feel independent of their ryots and their wishes.

But whether we reach the ideal State outlined here during the present generation or ever, surely there is nothing to prevent the Hindu princes from following the example set by Travancore, and thus hastening the day of the total removal of untouchability from Hinduism, and helping to save it from certain destruction. I would advise the responsible Hindus in every Hindu State to approach their princes and their advisers to initiate the overdue reform.

Harijan, 21-11-'36

85

FROM A SPEECH AT VENGANOOR

'I hope you will make a wise and religious use of the Proclamation,' Gandhiji said at a big meeting of the Pulayas at Venganoor. 'It depends upon our mental condition whether we gain something or do not gain anything by going to the temples. We have to approach these temples in a humble and penitent mood. They are so many houses of God. Of course God resides in every human form, indeed in every particle of His creation, everything that is on this earth. But since we, very fallible mortals, do not appreciate the fact that God is everywhere, we impute special sanctity to temples and think that God resides there. And so when we approach these temples we must cleanse our bodies, our minds and our hearts and we should enter them in a prayerful mood and ask God to make us purer men and purer women for having entered their portals. And if you will take this advice of an old man, this physical deliverance that you have secured will be a deliverance of the soul.

Harijan, 23-1-'37

86

FROM THE QUILON SPEECH

In the midst of my struggle against untouchability I have been asked by several workers as to the essence of Hinduism.

I have fixed upon one Mantra that I am going to recite to you, as containing the whole essence of Hinduism. Many of you, I think, know the Ishopanishad. I read it years ago with translation and commentary. I learnt it by heart in Yeravda Jail. But it did not then captivate me, as it has done during the past few months, and I have now come to the final conclusion that if all the Upanishads and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be

reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse of the Ishopanishad were left intact in the memory of Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever.

This verse when translated would read as follows:

"God the Ruler pervades all there is in this universe. Therefore renounce and dedicate all to Him and then enjoy or use the portion that may fall to thy lot. Never covet anybody's possessions."

What more can a man in the street want to learn than this that the one God and Creator and Master of all that lives, pervades the universe? The three other parts of the Mantra follow directly from the first. If you believe that God pervades everything that He has created, you must believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him. And seeing that He is the Creator of His numberless children, it follows that you cannot covet anybody's possessions. If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it at His feet. That means that the act of renunciation of everything is not a mere physical renunciation but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is therefore a regeneration. And then since he who holds the body must eat and drink and clothe himself, he must naturally seek all that he needs from Him. And he gets it as a natural reward of that renunciation. As if this was not enough the Mantra closes with this magnificent thought: Do not covet anybody's possessions. The moment you carry out these precepts you become a wise citizen of the world, living at peace with all that lives. It satisfies one's highest aspirations on this earth and hereafter.

Harijan, 30-1-'37

87

FROM THE HARIPAD SPEECH

I should like to apply this Mantra to our own condition in virtue of the Proclamation. Whilst I have unstintingly associated myself in your rejoicings over this great Proclamation and in tendering my thanks and congratulations to His Highness, Her Highness and their Diwan, in terms of this Mantra I am obliged also to say that this Proclamation is a tardy carrying out of the behest contained in this verse of the Ishopanishad that I have recited. Only yesterday we were unfit to call ourselves Hindus. For if all that there is in the universe is pervaded by God, that is to say, if the Brahmana and the Bhangi, the learned man and the scavenger, the Ezhava and the Pariah, no matter what caste they belong to — if all these are pervaded by Lord God, in the light of this Mantra, there is none that is high and none that is low, all are absolutely equal, equal because all are the creatures of that Creator. And this is not a philosophical thing to be dished out to Brahmanas or Kshatriyas, but it enunciates as eternal truth which admits of no reduction, no palliation. And if that is so, how can anyone here dare to arrogate superiority to himself or herself over any other human being? I tell you, therefore, that if this Mantra holds good, if there is any man or woman here who believes that the temples are defiled by those called Avarnas, that person, I declare, would be guilty of a grave sin.

I would like the Mantra I have recited to be enshrined in the hearts of all our men and women and children; and if this contains, as I hold, the essence of Hinduism, it should be inscribed on the portals of every temple. Don't you then think that we should be belying that Mantra at every step if we excluded anyone from those temples?

Harijan, 30-1-'37

88

FROM THE PANDALAI SPEECH

Great as this Proclamation is and great as is its religious merit, greater still is the responsibility that His Highness has taken upon his shoulders, and also his advisers. Whilst without the effort of every Savarna Hindu the Proclamation can undoubtedly be rendered ineffective, I must also say that the Proclamation would not have its full effect unless it is backed in an ample measure by State action. So far as I can see the Proclamation demands State activities in all departments of life. Of these I propose to take the religious first ; because from it must follow activities in all the other departments.

I venture to suggest that it is the duty of the State — or of the Maharaja, if there is any distinction between the two, for he is the custodian of the vast majority of Hindu temples — that he should see to it that the temples are renovated spiritually, and have the authority and sanctity that they used undoubtedly to have at one time. And I believe that it can only be done if they are in charge of priests who know what they have to do, who know something of the sanctity of them, and of the duties to which they are called. In other words, they should not be ignorant people following their calling for a livelihood, but they should be men who are proud of their privilege of bringing the message of God to temple-goers, showing by their own conduct and their life that these temples are abodes of divinity.

Then there should be the correct kind of instruction given in these temples. The Harijans will be taken by the hand by someone in charge of temples and they will be told what they are expected to gain by temple-worship. This means undoubtedly, according to modern thought, a revolution in the upkeep and conduct of these temples. But the Proclamation itself is nothing short of a revolutionary document, and if that revolution is to touch, as it

ought to touch, the lives of all Hindus, naturally temples have to be abodes of the living God, and not abodes of a mere mass of gold or other metals worked into figures. Then I should expect a history of these temples, understandable by the common folk, to be distributed freely or at a cheap price to all who want to know what these temples are. That means a training school for training the right kind of teachers who will be entrusted with the religious training of the people. If some such thing does not happen, I fear that the purpose of the Proclamation, viz. to expect and to induce lakhs and lakhs of Harijans to go to these temples in a religious spirit, will fail.

So much for the religious department. Then I take the economic. The economic life of the Harijans has got to be lifted out of its miserable state. I venture to think that by a judicious and thoughtful working out of the programme, it can be prosecuted in a short time and with a limited financial outlay in such a manner that Harijans may be easily able to hold their own by being taught to turn an honest Chakram. Nor can the State now dare neglect the mental training—I mean literary—of these people. I know to my cost that today it is very difficult to carry on a connected conversation with Pulayas and Pariahs so that you can get a ready response even about simple facts of life.

Similarly, the State has to raise the social status of these people. They should be invited to all State occasions and functions, as, for instance, Durbars. They must not be allowed to feel that these functions are a sealed book to them, and that they should have to have another agitation before they can attain a social status entitling them to be invited or allowed to take part in those functions. But if the Proclamation bears the meaning I have given to it, then the social uplift of the Harijans has to come as if by magic, as the religious status of going to the temples has come.

In my humble opinion, in suggesting this fourfold programme of the uplift of the Harijans in the State I have

not suggested any programme beyond the capacity or resources of a State like Travancore.

But having addressed these few words to the State in all humility, I want to come back to you. The State may resolve to do all these things, but its resolution will not mean the coming-in of man-power in order to carry out all these things. And if, from the few words I have addressed to their Highnesses and their advisers, you think that after all it is their Highnesses who have to do everything and you have to do nothing, then I am afraid that my labours will have gone in vain. The requisite man-power cannot come by offers of money. Thus, for instance, men who are capable of taking the management of temples cannot be had by offering scholarships of hundreds of rupees. For such people have got to be fired by a religious spirit, by love of their own work, and should therefore be ready to work for a bare maintenance. It should be their proud privilege to take this training and to fit themselves for this highest task in life. Similarly, unless the State gets men required for giving Harijans educational training, the State can do nothing.

His Highness the Maharaja going to the temple every day and taking instructions as to his daily duties from Shri Padmanabhaswami means nothing less than that he should be assisted by his people for their own good — spiritual, religious, social, economic.

Harijan, 6-2-'37

89

SELF-INFLICTED UNTOUCHABILITY

Dear Mahatmaji,

The subject of this letter is self-inflicted untouchability. I have already told you in a previous letter that even the non-Brahmana Savarna Hindus are untouchable to the temple gods and goddesses. In all public temples *pujas* are performed by the Savarna Brahmanas and all but the Savarna Brahmanas are untouchable to the gods and goddesses worshipped therein. There are numerous private temples in the houses of non-Brahmana Savarna Hindus; there also the *pujas* are performed by the Savarna Brahmanas. Even the Savarna non-Brahmana owners of those temples who defray the expenses and pay the priests, are untouchable to the gods and goddesses of those temples. Is this not self-inflicted untouchability? I will just cite a typical case of self-inflicted untouchability.

About three miles from my country-house there is a village of fishermen. They are untouchable and belong to a scheduled caste. They have their own Brahmanas who are also untouchable to the Savarna Hindus. These untouchable Brahmanas perform the ordinary *pujas* in the houses of the fishermen. These Brahmanas are called Asavarna or Avarna Brahmanas. The headmen of the fishermen-village are rich and possess considerable landed property. They have a private temple of Jagannath built and maintained at their own cost in the precincts of their house where *pujas* are performed daily at their expense by Savarna Brahmanas imported from Orissa. The fishermen owners of the temple are not only untouchable to the idols of Jagannath, they worship through those imported Brahmanas, but they cannot even enter the temple. During two days in a year, i.e. car festival day and return car festival day, the idols come out of the temple, ride on the car and become touchable to their fishermen owners. That is not all; the idols become impure as soon as they are touched by their fishermen-owners and cannot re-enter the temple without going through a purification ceremony called Abhisheka. The ceremony also takes place just after the two car festival days at the expense of those fishermen. What is this, if not self-inflicted untouchability? The bulk of the Hindu society believes, or rather is made to believe, that the material and spiritual salvation of the Hindus lies in the observance of untouchability. The untouchables have been taught to believe that they cannot touch an idol or a Brahmana without committing a sin for which they are bound to go to hell. It is impossible to deal exhaustively

with the various complexities of untouchability that make the sovereignty of Brahmanas a permanent institution. All this is due to an imaginary force of which the temple is the citadel. The untouchables are badly in need of pure intelligence to appreciate truth, but the temple untouchability gives them a negation of it. Buddha failed to mend the temples. He ended them. For a time Buddha temples had displaced the temples of untouchability throughout India; but in course of time the latter resurrected themselves and made the former things of the past. So it is not possible at all to mend the temples of untouchability. The temple irreligion must be ended for the sake of humanity. The time forces are favourable. The salvation of the untouchables lies in annihilation of those temples where untouchability is the essence of religion. The time forces are carrying the work of their annihilation slowly but steadily. You are a seeker after truth. May God send a wave of pure intelligence for those unintelligent untouchables through you so that they may follow you and find Truth.

I remain yours truly,
Hara Dayal Nag

The first letter referred to in the foregoing was inadvertently destroyed. Happily the reader has the gist of it in this. Shri Hara Dayal Nag says truly that if the temple untouchability is not destroyed, the temples have to be; and if temples go, with them must disappear Hinduism as we know it.

Harijan, 8-5-'37

90

A TEMPLE TRUSTEE'S POSER

Q: I am a member of the A. I. C. C. Personally I neither believe in nor observe taboos relating to untouchability. But I am a trustee of a temple built by my ancestors who were thoroughly orthodox in their religious outlook. I feel that it would be a breach of trust to throw it open to Harijans. Would that stand in the way of my signing the Satyagraha pledge?

A: It would stand very much in the way of your signing the pledge. It would be no breach of trust if the law allows you to open the temple. The condition was immoral as we have now discovered and hence invalid.

Harijan, 8-6-'40

HARIJANS AND TEMPLE-ENTRY

A friend from Wadhwan writes :

"You must be receiving reports about the entry of the Harijans into temples. These days Harijans are taken into temples anyhow — with or against the consent of the trustees. One can understand the insistence on getting Harijans admitted to Vaishnavite Havelis or Ramji Mandirs, but one fails to understand what good it can serve to take them into Swami Narayan or Jain temples in which they do not believe. Or, is it supposed that they will develop faith in them, the moment they are admitted there ?"

The other letter is from Ahmedabad. It is unsigned and carries only a *Nom de Plume* : 'Your oppressed ones'. From the handwriting and the language it is clear that it has not emanated from the pen of the Harijans I know. Its relevant portion is as follows :

"On the festival of Makar Sankranti on the 14th, Harijans tried to visit temples. When they reached the Swami Narayan Mandir at 8 a.m. with the Bhajan Mandalis they found the doors shut and fastened with Khambhati locks. They are squatting there still making Satyagraha. They refuse to go to work. The local Congress Committee has condemned their action. How strange ? If they do not come into their rights even after the attainment of independence when will they at all ? Local Congressmen go there and return after a few minutes' stay — there is no serious effort, no effective help and the poor Harijans are left to drown their discomfiture by bawling out devotional songs in the bitter cold. Who will end this impasse ? There is no man with personality or character among the Congressmen here. In Dakor Shri Ravishankar Maharaj used his influence to get the Harijans admitted into the temple there. But there is nobody to get them admittance to temples here. Are the Harijans for ever to be baulked of their inherent right ? Only your intervention can save the situation. Today for the third day thousands of Harijan Satyagrahis are squatting in front of the temple gates exposed to the inclemencies of the weather. They do not want to go to law. Nor is there a likelihood of the hearts of the so-called Savarnas melting. What will be the end ? Would you, please, show the way out ?"

The distinction drawn by the writer of the first letter, in my opinion, has no meaning. The Harijans are entitled

to and do actually visit Swami Narayan and Jain temples and they should be allowed to do so. For years there has been a movement to secure for the Harijans equal temple-entry rights with the Brahmanas and it has met with considerable success. Now that the Bombay Government have passed a law to that effect, there seems to be no occasion left for Satyagraha. If the law reflects popular opinion it ought to command spontaneous acceptance and respect. If, on the other hand, it is in the teeth of popular opinion, its enforcement will be retarded. In democracy a law cannot be given effect to by force. It calls for discerning circumspection. It will succeed in its object if the reformer makes an intelligent and discriminating use of it. Hurry or impatience will defeat its object.

Trustees are not owners of temples. Even owners cease to have property rights over temples when they are meant for public use. True owners of the temples are the votaries who go there to worship. Regarded in this light, all Jain and Swami Narayan temples are Hindu shrines. I have myself visited these temples. No one even cared to inquire as to what my sect was. It was enough that I looked like a Hindu. The same holds good of hundreds of other visitors like myself. Therefore, the Harijans must be free to visit all temples that are open to the Hindus. Today, awakened public opinion and the law which embodies the opinion do not regard Harijans as a separate caste, but an integral part of the four or the eighteen Varnas comprising Hindu society. Therefore, the contrary view cannot prevail. It is the devotee's devotion that makes a temple a living shrine. The deity in the temple is only a reflection of the devotee's spirit.

To come to the second letter — in spite of my clear view being as stated above, I fail to appreciate the importunity of the Harijans. The squatters are not true devotees. They do not care for *deva-darshan* ; they are running only after their right, and to that extent they are running away from true religion. To write letters anonymously or get others to write them for you is not the mark of a devotee.

A true devotee will follow in the footsteps of Nandanar who disdained help of anybody but God. Today he commands the homage even of the Brahmana who regards himself as 'high caste'. I look forward to the birth of a Naṇdanar, among those who have become Harijans by adoption. And I know that must be the wish of the Harijans by birth too. If non-Harijan Hindu society wants, let them take Harijans to their temples and shrines with due regard and respect. If not, and pending that consummation, let the Harijans stay in their homes and sanctify them by the purifying Ganga of their devotion. They don't have need to squat or sit *dharna* before any temple. In my opinion such *dharna* carries no merit — it is irreligious, sinful and fit only to be eschewed.

Harijan, 1-2-'48

SECTION NINE: VYKOM SATYAGRAHA

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VYKOM SATYAGRAHA

Vykom of which till lately no one outside Travancore, at most the Madras Presidency, knew anything has suddenly leapt to fame because it has become the seat of Satyagraha. The Press contains daily bulletins of the progress of the movement. It has been undertaken on behalf of the 'untouchables' of Travancore. The movement has given us another word to describe the condition of the suppressed classes. It is unapproachability. These poor countrymen of ours may not only not touch any other Caste Hindus but they may not even approach them within a stated distance. The leaders of the movement with a view to remedying the evil have taken up only a fragment of the evil, hoping no doubt that if they deal with it successfully, they will have dealt it a death-blow at least in that part of India in which direct action is now going on. In the prosecution of the campaign some of the staunchest workers of Malabar have been imprisoned. There can now be no receding. The struggle may last long if orthodox Hindu opinion is actively hostile to the movement. The Satyagrahis are certain to break down the wall of prejudice, no matter how strong and solid it may be if they continue firm but humble, truthful and non-violent. They must have faith enough in these qualities to know that they will melt the stoniest hearts.

Young India, 17-4-'24

93

SOME IMPLICATIONS

I have been asked to develop the argument against sending aid, apart from public sympathy, from outside Travancore. I have already stated the utilitarian argument in an interview. But there is a root objection too to getting, indeed even accepting, such support. Satyagraha is either offered by a few self-sacrificing persons in the name of the many weak, or by very few in the face of enormous odds. In the former case which is the case in Vykom, many are willing but weak, and a few are willing and capable of sacrificing their all for the cause of 'untouchables'. In such a case it is obvious they need no aid whatsoever. But suppose that they took outside aid, how would it serve the 'untouchable' countrymen? The weak Hindus in the absence of strong ones rising in their midst will not prevail against the strong opponents. The sacrifice of helpers from other parts of India will not convert the opponents and it is highly likely that the last state of the 'untouchables' will be worse than the first. Let it be remembered that Satyagraha is a most powerful process of conversion. It is an appeal to the heart. Such an appeal cannot be successfully made by people from other parts of India flocking to Vykom.

Nor should a campaign conducted from within need outside monetary support. All the weak but sympathetic Hindus of Travancore may not court arrest and other suffering, but they can and should render such pecuniary assistance as may be needed. I cannot understand their sympathy without such support.

In the case too of a very few offering Satyagraha against heavy odds, outside support is not permissible. Public Satyagraha is an extension of private or domestic Satyagraha. Every instance of public Satyagraha should be tested by imagining a parallel domestic case. Thus, suppose in my family I wish to remove the curse of untouchability.

Suppose further that my parents oppose the view, that I have the fire of the conviction of Prahlad, that my father threatens penalties, calls in even the assistance of the State to punish me. What should I do? May I invite my friends to suffer with me the penalties my father has devised for me? Or is it not up to me, meekly to bear all the penalties my father inflicts on me and absolutely rely on the law of suffering and love to melt his heart and open his eyes to the evil of untouchability? It is open to me to bring in the assistance of learned men, the friends of the family, to explain to my father what he may not understand from me, his child. But I may allow no one to share with me the privilege and duty of suffering. What is true of this supposed case of domestic Satyagraha is equally true and no less of the case we have imagined of public Satyagraha. Whether therefore the Vykom Satyagrahis represent a hopeless minority or as I have been informed, a majority of the Hindus concerned, it is clear that they should avoid aid from outside save that of public sympathy. That in every such case we may not be able to conform to the law, that in the present case too, we may not be able to do so may be true. Let us not however forget the law and let us conform to it as far as ever we can.

Young India, 24-4-'24

VYKOM SATYAGRAHA

Vykom Satyagraha has attracted such wide public attention, and though restricted to a small area, presents so many problems for solution that I offer no apology to the reader for constantly engaging his attention for it.

I have received several important and well-thought-out letters protesting against my countenancing it in any way whatsoever. One such letter even urges me to use whatever influence I may have, for stopping it altogether. I am sorry that I am unable to publish all these letters. But I hope to cover all the points raised in these letters or otherwise brought to my notice.

The first may be cleared at once. Exception has been taken to Shri George Joseph — a Christian — having been allowed to replace Shri Menon as leader and organizer. In my humble opinion the exception is perfectly valid. As soon as I heard that Shri Joseph was 'invited to take the lead' and he contemplated taking it, I wrote to him as follows on 6th April:

> "As to Vykom. I think that you should let the Hindus do the work. It is they who have to purify themselves. You can help by your sympathy and by your pen, but not by organizing the movement and certainly not by offering Satyagraha. If you refer to the Congress resolution of Nagpur, it calls upon the Hindu members to remove the curse of untouchability. I was surprised to learn from Mr Andrews that the disease had infected even the Syrian Christians."

Unfortunately before the letter could reach him, Shri Menon was arrested and Shri George Joseph had taken his place. But he had nothing to expiate, as every Hindu has in the matter of untouchability as countenanced by the Hindus. His sacrifice cannot be appropriated by the Hindus in general as expiation made, say by Malaviyaji would be. Untouchability is the sin of the Hindus. They must suffer for it, they must purify themselves, they must pay

the debt they owe to their suppressed brothers and sisters. Theirs is the shame and theirs must be the glory when they have purged themselves of the black sin. The silent, loving suffering of one single pure Hindu as such will be enough to melt the heart of millions of Hindus; but the sufferings of thousands of non-Hindus on behalf of the 'untouchables' will leave the Hindus unmoved. Their blind eyes will not be opened by outside interference, however well-intentioned and generous it may be; for it will not bring home to them the sense of guilt. On the contrary, they would probably hug the sin all the more for such interference. All reforms to be sincere and lasting must come from within.

But why may the Vykom Satyagrahis not receive monetary aid from outside, especially if it be from Hindus? So far as non-Hindu assistance is concerned, I am as clear about such pecuniary help as I am about such personal help. I may not build my Hindu temple with non-Hindu money. If I desire a place of worship I must pay for it. This removal of untouchability is much more than building a temple of brick and mortar. Hindus must bleed for it, must pay for it. They must be prepared to forsake wife, children and all for the sake of removing the curse. As for accepting assistance from Hindus from outside, such acceptance would betray unreadiness on the part of the local Hindus for the reform. If the Satyagrahis have the sympathy of the local Hindus, they must get locally all the money they may need. If they have not, the very few who may offer Satyagraha must be content to starve. If they are not, it is clear that they will evoke no sympathy among the local Hindus whom they want to convert. Satyagraha is a process of conversion. The reformers, I am sure, do not seek to force their views upon the community; they strive to touch its heart. Outside pecuniary help must interfere with the love process if I may so describe the method of Satyagraha. Thus viewed, the proposed Sikh free kitchen, I can only regard, as a menace to the frightened Hindus of Vykom.

There is no doubt in my mind about it that the orthodox Hindus, who still think that worship of God is inconsistent with touching a portion of their own co-religionists and that a religious life is summed up in ablutions and avoidance of physical pollutions merely, are alarmed at the development of the movement at Vykom. They believe that their religion is in danger. It behoves the organizers, therefore, to set even the most orthodox and the most bigoted at ease and to assure them that they do not seek to bring about the reform by compulsion. The Vykom Satyagrahis must stoop to conquer. They must submit to insults and worse at the hands of the bigoted and yet love them, if they will change their hearts.

But a telegram says in effect, 'the authorities are barricading the roads; may we not break or scale the fences? May we not fast? For we find that fasting is effective.'

My answer is, if we are Satyagrahis, we dare not scale or break fences. Breaking or scaling fences will certainly bring about imprisonment but the breaking will not be civil disobedience. It will be essentially incivil and criminal. Nor may we fast. I observe that my letter to Shri Joseph with reference to fasting has been misunderstood. For the sake of ready reference I reproduce below the relevant part:

> "'Omit fasting but stand or squat in relays with quiet submission till arrested.'
>
> "The above is the wire sent to you in reply to yours. Fasting in Satyagraha has well-defined limits. You cannot fast against a tyrant, for it will be a species of violence done to him. You invite penalty from him for disobedience of his orders but you cannot inflict on yourselves penalties when he refuses to punish, and renders it impossible for you to disobey his orders so as to compel infliction of penalty. Fasting can only be resorted to against a lover, not to extort rights but to reform him, as when a son fasts for a father who drinks. My fast at Bombay and then at Bardoli was of that character. I fasted to reform those who loved me.

But I will not fast to reform, say, General Dyer, who not only does not love me but who regards himself as my enemy. Am I quite clear ? "

It need not be pointed out that the above remarks are of a general character. The words 'tyrant' and 'lover' have also a general application. The one who does an injustice is styled 'tyrant'. The one who is in sympathy with you is the 'lover'. In my opinion, in the Vykom movement opponents of the reform are the 'tyrant'. The State may or may not be that. In this connection I have considered the State as merely the police striving to keep the peace. In no case is the State or the opponents in the position of 'lover'. The supporters of Vykom Satyagrahis enjoy that status. There are two conditions attached to a Satyagrahi fast. It should be against the lover and for his reform, not for extorting rights from him. The only possible case in the Vykom movement when a fast will be justified, would be when the local supporters go back upon their promise to suffer. I can fast against my father to cure him of a vice, but I may not in order to get from him an inheritance. The beggars of India who sometimes fast against those who do not satisfy them are no more Satyagrahis than children who fast against a parent for a fine dress. The former are impudent, the latter are childish. My Bardoli fast was against fellow-workers who ignited the Chauri Chaura spark and for the sake of reforming them. If the Vykom Satyagrahis fast because the authorities will not arrest them, it will be, I must say in all humility, the beggar's fast described above. If it proves effective it shows the goodness of the authorities, not that of the cause or of the actors. A Satyagrahi's first concern is not the effect of his action. It must always be its propriety. He must have faith enough in his cause and his means, and know that success will be achieved in the end.

But, say some of my correspondents, the conditions for lawful Satyagraha do not exist in Vykom. They ask :

1. Is unapproachability exclusively observed at Vykom or is it general throughout Kerala ?

2. If it is general, then what is the special reason for selecting Vykom in preference to places within the British territory in Kerala ?

3. Did the Satyagrahis petition the Maharaja, the local Assembly etc. ?

4. Did they consult the orthodox sections ?

5. Is not the use of the road the thin end of the wedge, is it not a step towards the abolition of caste altogether ?

6. Is not the road a private road ?

The first two questions are irrelevant. Unapproachability and untouchability have to be tackled wherever they exist. Wherever the workers consider a place or time suitable, it is their duty to start work whether by Satyagraha or other legitimate means.

My information goes to show that the method of petition etc., was tried not once but often.

They did consult the orthodox people and thought that they had the latter's support.

I am assured that the use of the road is the final goal of the Satyagrahis. It is however not to be denied that the present movement throughout India is to throw open to the suppressed classes all the *public* roads, *public* schools, *public* wells and *public* temples which are accessible to non-Brahmanas.

It is in fact a movement to purify caste by ridding it of its most pernicious result.

I have letters which protest that the road in question is a public road. In fact my informants tell me it was some years ago even accessible to the unapproachables as to other non-Brahmanas.

In my opinion, therefore, there is a just cause for the Vykom Satyagraha, and so far as it is kept within proper limits and conducted with the strictest regard to non-violence and truth, it deserves full public sympathy.

Young India, 1-5-'24

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VYKOM SATYAGRAHA

The Vykom Satyagraha is, I fear, crossing the limits. I do hope that the Sikh free kitchen will be withdrawn and that the movement will be confined to Hindus only. The Hindu reformers of Malabar will estrange the entire Hindu sympathy if they accept or encourage non-Hindu interference or assistance beyond sympathy. I am sure that the Hindu reformers who are leading the movement in Vykom do not want to convert their orthodox brethren by compulsion. In any case let them recognize the boundary line which a Satyagrahi must not cross. I respectfully urge the reformers not to over-awe the orthodox. I dissent from the view that once the disputed road to Vykom is free the problem of untouchability is solved even in Malabar. Victory in Vykom, if non-violent, will no doubt shake the citadel of sacerdotal superstition in general, but the problem will have to be everywhere locally tackled wherever it arises. Because a well in one place in Gujarat is thrown open for the use of the 'untouchables', it does not follow that all the wells in Gujarat will be opened for their use. And how would it fare with Hinduism if the Christian, the Muslim, the Akali, and other non-Hindu friends of the Hindu reformers made a demonstration against the orthodox Hindus, financed the reformers and finally overawed the orthodox into subjection? Will that be Satyagraha, will submission then be voluntary, will it be a reform in Hinduism?

Young India, 8-5-'24

VYKOM

The Vykom Satyagraha has entered upon probably the last stage. The newspapers report — and the report is confirmed by private advice — that the Travancore authorities have now practically abandoned the Satyagrahis to the tender mercies of Goondas. This is euphemistically called the organized opposition of the orthodox section. Every one knows that orthodoxy is often unscrupulous. It has as a rule prestige and public opinion behind it in comparison with the reformer. It therefore does things with impunity which the poor reformer dare not. But what baffles one is the attitude of the Travancore authorities. Are they conniving at this open violence against the innocent Satyagrahis? Has such an advanced State, like Travancore abdicated its elementary function of protection of life and property? The violence of the Goondas is said to be of a particularly barbarous type. They blind the eyes of volunteers by throwing lime into them.

The representatives from Kerala asked me if they should not have a resolution of the Congress supporting the movement. I told them that I did not like the idea. What they wanted was moral support. It would have been given by the Committee for the asking, if they had sent a resolution to the President. My responsibility in dissuading them was therefore serious. But I am convinced that all local movements must be self-reliant and that the A.I.C.C. should give its moral support only in exceptional cases. The Travancore authorities may however be respectfully told that the Congress cannot watch barbarity with philosophic indifference. So long as Satyagraha is met by ordinary State processes, the movement must remain local. But the letting loose of the Goondas on the devoted heads of the Satyagrahis is bound to gather round the Satyagrahis the full weight of all-India public opinion.

A word now to the organizers of Vykom Satyagraha. The challenge of the Goondas must be taken up. But the Satyagrahis must not lose their heads. The Khaddar dress of the volunteers is said to have been torn from them and burnt. This is all most provoking. They must remain cool under every provocation and courageous under the hottest fire. Loss even of a few hundred lives will not be too great a price to pay for the freedom of the 'unapproachables'. Only the martyrs must die clean. Satyagrahis like Caesar's wife must be above suspicion.

Young India, 3-7-'24

97

VYKOM SATYAGRAHA

The Vykom Satyagraha has perhaps a meaning deeper than is generally realized. The young men who have organized it are stern in discipline and gentle in their dealings with the orthodox section. But this is the least part of their trials. Some of them are suffering too the persecution of social boycott. We of the Western Presidency have no idea of what this persecution can mean. These young men who are taking part in the movement are not only being denied social amenities but are threatened even with the deprivation of their share in the family property. If they would go to law, probably they would get their due. But a Satyagrahi cannot go to law for a personal wrong. He sets out with the idea of suffering persecution. In a reform that the Vykom struggle seeks to achieve, the Satyagrahi seeks to convert his opponent by sheer force of character and suffering. The purer he is and the more he suffers, the quicker the progress. He must therefore resign himself to being excommunicated, debarred from the family privileges and deprived of his share in the family property. He must not only bear such hardships cheerfully but he must actively love his persecutors. The latter honestly believe that the reformer is doing something sinful and therefore

resort to the only means they know to be effective to wean him from his supposed error. The Satyagrahi, on the other hand, does not seek to carry out his reform by a system of punishments but by penance, self-purification and suffering. Any resentment of the persecution, therefore, would be an interruption of the course of discipline he has imposed upon himself. It may be a prolonged course, it may even seem to be never ending. A little bullying or even moral suasion or coercion may appear more expeditious. What, however, I am showing here is not the greater efficacy of Satyagraha but the implications of the method the Satyagrahi has deliberately chosen for himself. Indeed I have often shown in these pages that Satyagraha is, as a matter of fact and in the long run, the most expeditious course. But my purpose here is merely to show what the young Satyagrahis of Vykom are doing. The public know much of what they are doing in the shape of picketing but they know nothing of the silent suffering some of them are undergoing at the hands of their families and castemen. But I know that it is this silent and loving suffering which will finally break the wall of prejudice. I am anxious therefore that the reformers should realize their responsibility to the full and not swerve by a hair's breadth from their self-imposed discipline.

Young India, 18-9-'24

98

VYKOM SATYAGRAHA

The Vykom Satyagrahis are fighting a battle of no less consequence than that of Swaraj. They are fighting against an age-long wrong and prejudice. It is supported by orthodoxy, superstition, custom and authority. Theirs is only one among the many battles that must be fought in the holy war against irreligion masquerading as religion, ignorance appearing in the guise of learning. If their battle is to be bloodless, they must be patient under the severest trials. They must not quail before a raging fire.

The Congress Committee may give them no help. They may get no pecuniary help, they may have to starve. Their faith must shine through all these dark trials.

Theirs is 'direct action'. They dare not be irritated against their opponents. The opponents know no better. They are not all dishonest men as Satyagrahis are not all honest men. They are resisting what they honestly believe to be an encroachment upon their religion. The Vykom Satyagraha is the argument of suffering. The hardest heart and the grossest ignorance must disappear before the rising sun of suffering without anger and without malice.

Young India, 19-2-'25

99

VYKOM SATYAGRAHA

I make bold to state that from the very outset Satyagraha at Vykom was intended to be an educative force and never an instrument of coercion of the orthodox. It was for that reason that the fast against the orthodox was abandoned. It was to avoid coercion of the Government by embarrassment that the barricades have been scrupulously respected. It was for that reason that no attempt was made to dodge the police. It has been recognized that what appears to the reformers as a gross and sinful superstition is to the orthodox a part of their faith. The Satyagrahi's

appeal has therefore been to the reason of the orthodox. But experience has shown that mere appeal to the reason produces no effect upon those who have settled convictions. The eyes of their understanding are opened not by argument but by the suffering of the Satyagrahi. The Satyagrahi strives to reach the reason through the heart. The method of reaching the heart is to awaken public opinion. Public opinion for which one cares is a mightier force than that of gunpowder. The Vykom Satyagraha has vindicated itself in that it has drawn the attention of the whole of India to the cause, and it has been instrumental in the Travancore Assembly considering in a remarkable debate a resolution favouring the reform sought for and lastly in eliciting a considered reply from the Dewan of Travancore. I am sure victory is a certainty if only the Satyagrahis will retain their patience and their spirit of suffering.

Young India, 19-3-'25

100

ADVICE TO VYKOM SATYAGRAHIS

The conduct of Satyagrahis in the Ashram must be in correspondence with their bearing at the boundary line. The Ashram must be a busy hive in which every member is ever found at his own allotted task. It must be a model of simplicity and sanitation. The members are pledged to the Charkha work during all spare moments. The spinning, the carding and the weaving departments admit of considerable improvement. Every inmate should be an expert carder and spinner if everyone cannot also become an expert weaver. The members must insist on spinning and weaving at least the cloth required by them. They should also learn Hindi well. They are or should regard themselves as trustees for the prestige and dignity of Hinduism. Theirs is a fight not to end with the opening of the roads round temples but it should be considered to be the beginning of a glorious struggle for the purity of Hinduism and removal of the abuses that have crept into it. They are not

reformers who would take no note of the opposite side or would violate every sentiment of the orthodox people. They would vie with the tallest among the orthodox in purity of conduct and veneration for all that is good and noble in the Shastras. They would not disregard scriptural authority without the deepest thought, and to that end some of them would even study Sanskrit and explore the possibilities of reform within the four corners of the scriptures. They will not be in a hurry but having fearlessly taken all the steps that they can consistently with their creed of truth and non-violence, they will have the patience and the faith of the Rishis of old.

For the opening of the roads is not the final but the first step in the ladder of reform. Temples in general, public wells, public schools must be open to the 'untouchables' equally with the Caste Hindus. But that is not the present goal of the Satyagrahis. We may not force the pace. The schools are almost all open to the 'untouchables'. The temples and the public wells or tanks are not. Public opinion should be carefully cultivated and the majority should be converted before the reform can be successfully carried out. Meanwhile the remedy lies in founding temples and digging tanks or wells that would be open to the 'untouchables' and to the other Hindus. I have no doubt that the movement for the removal of untouchability has made tremendous headway. Let us not retard it by indiscretion or overzeal. Once the idea of pollution by the touch of a person by reason of his birth is gone the rest is easy and bound to follow.

Young India, 2-4-'25

101

PLACE OF SPINNING IN SATYAGRAHA

The reader may ask: What connection is there between the removal of untouchability and spinning? Apparently nothing. In reality much. It is not any single isolated act which can be called Satyagraha apart from the spirit behind. Here, there is the spirit behind the spinning which is bound to tell in the long run; for, spinning to these young men is a sacrificial national act calculated unconsciously to exhibit true humility, patience and pertinacity — qualities indispensable for clean success.

Young India, 24-9-'25

102

NEED FOR CONSTRUCTIVE WORK

The immediate goal of the Satyagrahis was the opening of the roads surrounding the temple, not their entry into the latter. But whilst Satyagraha was directed to the opening of roads, the ultimate aim of reformers is undoubtedly removal of every disability that the 'untouchables' are labouring under and which the other Hindus are not. It therefore includes access to temples, wells, schools, etc. to which other non-Brahmanas are freely admittted. But for achieving these reforms much remains to be done before the method of direct action can be adopted. Satyagraha is never adopted abruptly and never till all other and milder methods have been tried. The reformers of the South have to cultivate public opinion in the matter of temple entry etc. This is moreover a disability not peculiar to the South but unfortunately and, to our shame it must be admitted, common, to more or less extent, to Hinduism throughout India. I therefore welcome the decision of Shri Kellappan Nayar who was in charge of the camp at Vykom to concentrate his effort on working among

the unhappiest and the most suppressed among the 'untouchables' i.e. Pulayas whose very shadow defiles. It is a golden rule to follow out every direct action with constructive work i.e. work of conservation. Reform has to be undertaken at both ends to make Savarnas do their duty by the 'untouchables' whom they have so cruelly suppressed, and to help the latter to become more presentable and to shed habits for which they can in no way be held accountable but which nevertheless have to be given up if they are to occupy their proper place in the social scale.

Young India, 14-1-'26

103

GOD IS GREAT

When the Temple Entry Proclamation was issued, I had misgivings which I could not and would not suppress. But the actuality has surpassed all expectations. The enthusiasm of the Harijans, the absence of all opposition to their entrance to the farthest limit permissible to the highest caste, and the willing, nay the hearty co-operation of the officiating priests, show the utter genuineness of the great and sweeping reform. What seemed impossible for man has been made possible by God.

Only a few years ago in Vykom the Caste Hindus had threatened violence if Harijans crossed even certain roads leading to the Vykom temple. Now that very temple has been opened to Harijans on absolutely the same terms as to any Caste Hindu. And all this without the slightest pressure from anybody. What was quoted to me as the Shankara-smriti has given place to the Maharaja-smriti whose validity is proved by the unequivocal response of the Caste Hindus as a whole and the equally unequivocal response in another sense by the Harijans. Truly, God is Great, if we would but open the eyes of our understanding.

My congratulations to the Maharaja and his good mother and his great Diwan, as also the Hindus of Travancore. Let us hope that all caste distinctions in so far as they connote high and low grades, are things of the past in Travancore. If we garner the enthusiasm of Travancore, it cannot be long before the whole of India catches the Travancore spirit.

Harijan, 12-12-'36

SECTION TEN : CONVERSION

104

CONVERSION NO REMEDY

A remedy suggested to 'untouchables' is rejection of Hinduism and wholesale conversion to Islam or Christianity. And if a change of religion could be justified for worldly betterment, I would advise it without hesitation. But religion is a matter of the heart. No physical inconvenience can warrant abandonment of one's own religion. If the inhuman treatment of the Panchamas were a part of Hinduism, its rejection would be a paramount duty both for them and for those like me who would not make a fetish even of religion and condone every evil in its sacred name. But I believe that untouchability is no part of Hinduism. It is rather its excrescence to be removed by every effort. And there is quite an army of Hindu reformers who have set their heart upon ridding Hinduism of this blot. Conversion, therefore, I hold, is no remedy whatsoever.

Young India, 27-10-'20

Those who use the threat (of conversion) do not, in my humble opinion, know the meaning of religion. Religion is a matter of life and death. A man does not change religion as he changes his garments. He takes it with him beyond the grave. Nor does a man profess his religion to oblige others. He professes a religion because he cannot do otherwise. A faithful husband loves his wife as he would love no other woman. Even her faithlessness would not wean him from his faith. The bond is more than blood-relationship. So is the religious bond if it is worth anything. It is a matter of the heart. An 'untouchable' who lives his Hinduism in the face of persecution at the hands of those Hindus who arrogate to themselves a superior

status is a better Hindu than the self-styled superior Hindu, who by the very act of claiming superiority denies his Hinduism. Therefore, those who threaten to renounce Hinduism are in my opinion betraying their faith.

Young India, 4-6-'25

105

CONVERSIONS

If, afflicted by the persecution and losing hope of ever receiving help from the other Savarna Hindus, the poor Harijans seek the shelter of Christianity, we may not be surprised. And our grief is worse than useless if we cannot turn it into powerful energy. Conversion under the stress of physical discomfort is no spiritual conversion. But we may not grumble if Harijans change their faith in order to better their material condition and to secure protection from persecution.

What we need deplore is the cause of conversion. Let us realize and own that Savarna Hindus are the cause. Will they listen to this advice? Conversions are but one small result of the disease. Remove the cause, and the conversions will cease, as also many worse results.

Harijan, 22-3-'35

Men who threaten to leave their religion, because some other men, pretending to be of the same faith as they, prevent them from entering temples, have little religion about them. Such men cannot be said to be actuated by the religious spirit. Temples are houses of worship. They are for all who believe in them. Religious persecution is not a thing of today. It is as ancient as religion itself. It tries and purifies the persecuted who prove themselves staunch in their faith. If Harijans can patiently bear persecution, they are bound to come triumphant in the end.

But the threat to desert the faith they have uncomplainingly professed from time immemorial, if their right of temple-entry is not recognized, puts them out of court. Sanatanists probably do not care if Harijans leave the Hindu fold. Reformers will be nonplussed if they have no case to fight for. Fortunately, there are tens of thousands of Harijans whose faith remains unshakable in spite of persecution.

Religion is an essentially personal matter. It is one between oneself and one's God. It should never be made a matter of bargain.

Harijan, 29-3-'35

106

CONVERSION UNDESIRABLE

Even if change of faith, not on account of its inherent inadequacy but because of the unreasoning prejudice of many of its followers, were justified, in the present instance it can but defeat the cause intended to be served.

Secession of stalwarts like Dr. Ambedkar can but weaken the defence of Harijans. We know, as a matter of fact, that non-Hindu Harijans, no matter how eminent they may be, are not able to help Hindu Harijans. Indeed, they are a class apart still in their adopted faiths. Such is the hold untouchability of the Indian type has on the people in India.

Harijan, 26-10-'35

THE THREAT OF CONVERSION

Ever since Dr. Ambedkar has thrown his bombshell in the midst of Hindu society in the shape of threatened conversion, frantic efforts have been made to wean him from the proposed step. Dr. Ambedkar's threat has had its repercussions on Harijans too, who are at all literate and are able to read newspapers. They have begun to approach Hindu institutions or reformers with a demand for posts, scholarships, or the like, accompanying it with the statement that the writer might, in the event of refusal, be obliged to change to another faith, aid having been offered on behalf of the representatives of that faith.

Without a doubt these threats are a portent and a matter of grave concern to those who care at all for the religion of their forefathers. But it will not be served by coming to terms, with those who have lost faith in Hinduism or for that matter in any religion. Religion is not a matter of barter. It is a matter for every individual to decide for himself to which faith he will belong. It does not lend itself to purchase in any shape or form. Or if such an expression can be used in connection with things of the spirit, religion can only be purchased with one's own blood. If therefore any Harijan wants to give up Hinduism, he should be entirely free to do so.

There must be a searching of heart for the reformer. Has his practice or that of his neighbour's caused the defection? If it has and if it is bound to be improper, it must be changed.

It is an admitted fact that the conduct of a vast number of Hindus who call themselves Sanatanists is such as to cause the greatest inconvenience and irritation to the Harijans all over India. The wonder is that many more Harijans than already have, have not left Hinduism. It speaks volumes for their loyalty or for the innate virtue of Hinduism that millions of Harijans have clung to it in

spite of the inhumanities to which in the name of that very faith they have been subjected.

This wonderful loyalty of Harijans and their unexampled patience render it imperative for every Savarna Hindu to see that Harijans receive the same treatment that every other Hindu does. The course before Savarnas is, therefore, on the one hand, not to interfere with Harijans wishing to leave the Hindu fold by trying to keep them within it by the offer of bribes in the shape of finding employment or scholarships ; and on the other hand, to insist on full justice being done to Harijans in every walk of life. Indeed reformers should anticipate the Harijans' requirements and not wait till they begin to complain. The Harijan Sevak Sangh is the biggest institution for the removal of untouchability. It has wisely adopted a most liberal policy of giving scholarships to deserving students. It employs as many Harijans as possible. But it is in no sense a bureau for finding jobs for unemployed Harijans. Generally speaking, there is no dearth of jobs for Harijans who are fit for the jobs for which they offer themselves. The greatest hardship felt by thousands of Harijans is want of pure water for drinking and domestic use, denial of access to public schools and other institutions, constant pin-pricks in villages, and last but not least, denial of access to temples of worship. These disabilities are stern realities in the lives of the vast masses of Harijans. If they as a mass give up Hinduism, they will do so because of these common disabilities which brand them as lepers of Hindu society. Hinduism is passing through a fiery ordeal. It will perish not through individual conversions, not even through mass conversions, but it will perish because of the sinful denial by the so-called Savarna Hindus of elementary justice to Harijans. Every threat of conversion is, therefore, a warning to the Savarnas that if they do not wake up in time it may be too late !

One word to the impatient and needy Harijans. They must not use threats when they approach Hindu institutions or individuals for help. They should rely upon the

strength of their case demanding a hearing. The majority of Harijans do not know what change of religion can mean. They mutely suffer the continuing degradation to which Savarnas in their selfishness have consigned them. They must be the primary care of Hindu reformers whether they complain or do not. Those who are enlightened enough to know and feel the degradation and know also what change of religion means are either too good Hindus to desert their ancestral faith and deserve every help they need, or being indifferent as to religion may not claim help from Savarna Hindus in exchange for their condescending to remain in the Hindu fold. I would, therefore, plead with enlightened Harijans for their own sakes not to seek material betterment under threat of conversion. And whilst reformers must on no account yield to threats, they must ceaselessly strive to secure justice for Harijans at the hands of Savarna Hindus.

Harijan, 21-3-'36

108

A DANGEROUS PROPOSAL

Dr. Ambedkar wants to scourge the Savarna Hindus as he has every right to do, but he may not expect the latter to be party to it. He has every right to be impatient. But prejudices and superstitions centuries old do not die in a moment. No one who has at all cared to study the reform movement will deny that every attempt humanly possible has been and is being made to bring home to the Savarna Hindus the message of the anti-untouchability movement. If Dr. Ambedkar's proposal were accepted, the reform movement would receive a setback which might mean death to it in the end. For it contemplates a paper but legal transfer of Harijans from the Hindu fold to some other, no matter by what name the latter is called. It must mean fratricide. Harijans themselves will be cut up into two rival sections, and if they are both classified as Harijans within the meaning of the Pact their state

then will be worse than it is today, and it will be an evil day for unhappy India if such a calamity descends on her.

And who are we the self-constituted leaders to barter away the religious freedom of Harijans? Has not every Harijan, however dull or stupid he may be, the right to make his own choice? It is one thing for Dr. Ambedkar and those who wish to change over to some other religion to do so, and wholly another for political or other parties to assume such change for the mass of Harijans and to base thereon legal and other consequences of a far-reaching character.

If the leaders of different religions in India ceased to compete with one another for enticing Harijans into their fold, it would be well for this unfortunate country. I have the profound conviction that those who are engaged in the competition are not serving the cause of religion. By looking at it in terms of politics or economics they reduce the religious values, whereas the proper thing would be to estimate politics and every other thing in terms of religion. Religion deals with the science of the soul. Great as the other forces of the world are, if there is such a thing as God, soul force is the greatest of all. We know as a matter of fact that the greater the force the finer it is. Hitherto electricity has held the field among the finer physical powers. And yet nobody has seen it except through its wonderful results. Scientific speculation dares to talk of a force finer even than that of electricity. But no instrument devised by man has been able to know anything positive of soul force or spiritual force. It is on that force that the true religious reformer has hitherto relied and never without hope fulfilled. It is that force which will finally govern the welfare of Harijans and everyone else and confound the calculations of men however gifted they may be intellectually. The reformer who has entered upon the duty of ridding Hinduism of the disease of untouchability has to depend in everything he does on that force and nothing else.

Harijan, 22-8-'36

Two friends write to me deploring my attitude on Dr. Ambedkar's proposal. Their argument may be summed up as follows:

> 'Surely you are making much ado about nothing. Guru Nanak was a Hindu reformer like the others who have founded Hindu sects. Sikhs are Hindus to all intents and purposes. Their culture is the same as of the Hindus. If Harijans declare themselves as Sikhs, why do you call it change of faith?'

The objectors seem to be alone in their opinion. Some time after 1915 when I returned home from my self-imposed exile of fourteen years, I happened to go to the Punjab. Addressing a meeting of Sikhs, I had said they were in my opinion Hindus belonging to a sect of reformers. A well-meaning Sikh friend spoke to me aside and said I had unwittingly offended Sikhs by calling them Hindus. What they believe matters, not what I or a few individuals do. Sikhs have a separate electorate. Dr. Ambedkar does not regard Sikhs as Hindus. He definitely wants a change of faith. If Sikhs were a Hindu sect, no change in the Pact would be necessary. It is open to any Hindu to change his sect and still remain a Hindu.

Harijan, 19-9-'36

109

WHOSE IS THE HUMILIATION?

From a long letter of a worker among Harijans I take the following paragraph:

> "There is a growing discontent on the part of educated Harijans to call themselves Hindus. Because if they say they are Hindus, they have to disclose their caste also, and the inferiority complex makes this unpleasant. They would rather call themselves Christians than undergo humiliation by calling themselves Hindus. Why may we not then ask them to become Sikhs or Buddhists and end the humiliation? For Sikhs and Buddhists are as good as Hindus."

The correspondent gives up his case when he says that Sikhs and Buddhists are as good as Hindus. For if that is so, there is no occasion to prompt Harijans or anyone else in the direction. Any Hindu is free to call himself a

follower of any one of the innumerable Hindu sects and yet remain Hindu. And why should a Hindu disclose his caste if he does not want to or if he has renounced caste ? Many Hindus do not believe in caste. I have endeavoured to show that caste is no part of Hinduism. Varna is not caste, it is class. A man may call himself a Brahmana i.e. a teacher of religion if he is one in fact ; or a Kshatriya i.e. a soldier if he is one ; or a Vaishya i.e. a merchant or a farmer if he is that ; or a Shudra i.e. an employee if he is one. These divisions are not castes but classes and have reference to callings. There is no such class as 'untouchable'. Hence an 'untouchable' is not bound to say he is one. He may say if he wishes that Hindu society has regarded him as such but he does not recognize that distinction. I may say that though I have been classified by Hindu society as belonging to the Bania caste, I am not that, as I do not believe in caste, but that if I must call myself anything more than mere Hindu, I am a Harijan by choice, having made, so far as in me lies, common cause with Harijans.

And why is there any humiliation in a Harijan disclosing his classification made by Hindu society? Surely the humiliation is of the society that reduces its members to the condition of helots, consigned to ghettos and shunned by society. The very education of the Harijan should make him proud of the fact that he can truthfully call himself a Hindu even though so-called higher castes have denied their religion in their lives and persecuted him in a manner beyond description. If untouchability is destroyed root and branch and Hinduism lives, the future historian will assign the place of honour to Harijans who will have stood by their faith in spite of heartless persecution by their fellows. Each time, therefore, a Harijan has to say what he is classed as in Hindu society, the humiliation is not his but of his persecutors — the so-called Caste Hindus.

Harijan, 31-10-'36

110

CONVERTING TO CHRISTIANITY

Travancore has a large and important Christian community. Christian missions are flirting with Harijans, rightly no doubt from their own standpoint, they are spending money on them and holding out hope of real freedom and equality of social status. It is beside the present discussion that for Harijans there is no social equality, no real freedom anywhere except when it is first obtained in Hinduism. I am not thinking of the whole mass. The latter are so interwined with the other Hindus that unless they become brothers with them instead of remaining serfs which they are, no change of label can avail anything.

Harijan, 21-11-'36

111

CHRISTIAN MASS MOVEMENTS

About the 9th of October last there was a meeting of Christian denominations in London. His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury presided. The following occurs in the report of the meeting published in the *Church Times* of the 16th October :

> " The next speaker was dressed as a layman, without even the smallest discernible purple patch to indicate that he was Dr. J. W. Pickett, a Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, U. S. A. For some years past, Dr. Pickett has been studying the mass movements on the spot in India, and has published the results of his observations in *Christian Mass Movements in India*, described by the Archbishop of Canterbury as a remarkable and valuable book. Dr. Pickett is profoundly impressed with the spiritual significance of the movement. He said that four and a half millions of the depressed classes in India have become the disciples of our Lord, and the witness they bear to Him in their lives is making the multitudes in India marvel. Even Brahmanas have testified — albeit reluctantly — to the power of Christianity to transform the characters and lives of people whom they once thought incapable

of religious feelings, and to whom they denied the right of entrance to the temples of Hinduism. It is people of this kind, said Dr. Pickett, who have now standards of church attendance and worship difficult to equal in Western Christendom. He quoted an example in the Telugu area, where 9,00,000 people now profess the Christian Faith. Out of 1,026 villages, 1,002 hold a service for the worship of God every evening of the year, and more than two hundred also a daily morning service. It appeared to satisfy Dr. Pickett entirely as a test of the reality of the faith of the converts to hear a surprisingly high proportion of them speak of a sense of mystical union with God, and their belief that God had come into their lives. Even their Hindu neighbours admitted that the religion of Jesus Christ had lifted them to a new standard of cleanliness of person and home, and made them a trustworthy people. More impressive still is the fact that high caste people are now coming into the Church literally by dozens and hundreds in areas where this transformation of life has occurred among the untouchables, 'It is a miracle,' he declared; 'one of the great miracles of Christian history.'"

I have rarely seen so much exaggeration in so little space. A reader ignorant of conditions in India would conclude that the figures relate to the conversions due to the movement led by Dr. Ambedkar. I am sure Dr. Pickett could not have made any such claim. He has in mind the figures to date commencing from the establishment of the first church in India hundreds of years ago. But the figures are irrelevant to the general claim said to have been advanced by the Bishop. Where are "the multitudes in India who marvel" at the transformation in the lives of "four and a half millions of the depressed classes"? I am one of the multitude having practically travelled more than half a dozen times all over India, and have not seen any transformation on the scale described by Dr. Pickett, and certainly none of recent date. I have had the privilege of addressing meetings of Indian Christians who have appeared to me to be no better than their fellows. Indeed the taint of untouchability persists in spite of the nominal change of faith so far as the social status is concerned. Needless to say I am referring to the masses, not individuals. I should like to know the Brahmanas "who have

testified — albeit reluctantly — to the power of Christianity to transform the characters and lives of people whom they once thought incapable of religious feeling ". But if it is of any consequence, I can show many Brahmanas who can testify to the power of the reform movement to make a radical change in the lives and outlook of Harijans who were neglected by Caste Hindus. I must pass by the other unbelievable generalizations. But I should like to know the hundreds of high Caste Hindus who " are now coming into the Church in areas where this transformation of life has occurred among the untouchables ". If all the astounding statements Dr. Pickett has propounded can be substantiated, truly it is " one of the great miracles of Christian history ", nay, of the history of man.

But do miracles need an oratorical demonstration? Should we in India miss such a grand miracle? Should we remain untouched by it? Miracles are their own demonstration. As witness the miracle in Travancore. Nobody believed a month ago that more than 2,000 temples of Travancore could be opened to Harijans and that Harijans would enter them in their hundreds without let or hindrance from the most orthodox Hindus. Yet that event has happened in Travancore which even he who runs may see. It is beside the point whether it can be called a miracle or not. I see in it the visible finger of the invisible God.

I believe in the Bible as I believe in the Gita. I regard all the great faiths of the world as equally true with my own. It hurts me to see any one of them caricatured as they are today by their own followers and as has been done by the learned Bishop, assuming of course that the report reproduced above is substantially correct.

Harijan, 19-12-'36

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY EFFORT

[Dr. Mott's Questions]

Dr. Mott : " Removal of untouchability is the business of your lifetime. The importance of this movement lies beyond the frontiers of India, and yet there are few subjects on which there is more confusion of thought. Take for instance, the Missionaries and Missionary Societies. They are not of one mind. It is highly desirable that we become of one mind and find out how far we can help and not hinder. I am Chairman of the International Missionary Council which combines 300 Missionary Societies in the world. I have on my desk reports of these Societies, and I can say that their interest in the untouchables is deepening. I should be interested if you would feel free to tell me where, if anywhere, the Missionaries have gone along wrong lines. Their desire is to help and not to hinder."

Gandhiji : " I cannot help saying that the activities of the Missionaries in this connection have hurt me. They with the Musalmans and the Sikhs came forward as soon as Dr. Ambedkar threw the bombshell, and they gave it an importance out of all proportion to the weight it carried, and then ensued a rivalry between these organizations. I could understand the Muslim organizations doing this, as Hindus and Muslims have been quarrelling. The Sikh intervention is an enigma. But the Christian Mission claims to be a purely spiritual effort. It hurts me to find Christian bodies vying with the Muslims and Sikhs in trying to add to the numbers of their fold. It seemed to me an ugly performance and a travesty of religion. They even proceeded to enter into secret conclaves with Dr. Ambedkar. I should have understood and appreciated your prayers for the Harijans, but instead, you made an appeal to those who had not even the mind and intelligence to understand what you talked ; they have certainly not the intelligence to distinguish between Jesus and Muhammad and Nanak and so on."

Dr. Mott referred to the Archbishop of Canterbury's speech, and the talks he had with him, and other bishops and Missionary leaders in England, and emphasized the fact that the Christians should in no way seem to be bidding with others for the souls of the Indian people. He said he had a reassurance from the free as well as the State Church leaders, but in the secular papers it had got abroad that Dr. Ambedkar could hand over 50 million people to those who were prepared to accept them. He had sensed that it might mean a tremendous disservice. "The most trustworthy leaders of Protestant Missionary forces" said Dr. Mott, "would give what you have said great heed. They do believe increasingly in work for the untouchables. Tell us what we can wisely do and what we cannot wisely do."

Gandhiji: "So far as this desire of Dr. Ambedkar is concerned, you can look at the whole movement with utter calmness and indifference. If there is any answer to Dr. Ambedkar's appeal, and if the Harijans and he take the final step and come to you, you can take such steps as your conscience suggests. But today it seems unseemly and precipitate to anticipate what Dr. Ambedkar and Harijans are going to do."

Deenabandhu Andrews referred with condemnation to the Lucknow Conference and Dr. Mott said that what the Conference did was not authoritative.

Gandhiji: "It becomes authoritative owing to the silence of Christian bodies. If they had disowned all that happened it would have been well, but those who met at Lucknow perhaps felt that they were voicing the views of the Missionary bodies who, in their opinion, were not moving fast enough."

Dr. Mott: "But there was a disclaimer."

Gandhiji: "If there was, it did not travel beyond the English Channel."

Dr. Mott: "But there is a deplorable confusion of thought and divided counsel even amongst friends. The Devil would like nothing better. My life has been mostly

spent for the intellectual classes, and I feel very much conscience-moved to help in this movement."

Gandhiji cited the example of good Christians helping working under the Hindu banner. There was Mr Keithan who was trying hard to smooth the path of the 'untouchables'. There were Miss Barr and Miss Madden who had thrown themselves into the Rural Reconstruction movement. He then adverted to the problem in Travancore where an indecent competition was going on for enticing away the Ezhavas from the Hindu fold. "The Ezhavas in Travancore want temple-entry. But it is no use your asking me whether they want temple-entry. Even if they do not want it, I must see that they enjoy the same rights as I enjoy, and so the reformers there are straining every nerve to open the temple doors." [Curiously enough this talk was taking place exactly at the moment when the Travancore Proclamation was being issued.]

Dr. Mott: "But must we not serve them?"

Gandhiji: "Of course you will, but not make conversion the price of your service."

Dr. Mott: "I agree that we ought to serve them whether they become Christians or not. Christ offered no inducements. He offered service and sacrifice."

Gandhiji: "If Christians want to associate themselves with this reform movement they should do so without any idea of conversion."

Dr. Mott: "Apart from this unseemly competition, should they not preach the Gospel with reference to its acceptance?"

Gandhiji: "Would you, Dr. Mott, preach the Gospel to a cow? Well, some of the 'untouchables' are worse than cows in understanding. I mean they can no more distinguish between the relative merits of Islam and Hinduism and Christianity than can a cow. You can only preach through your life. The rose does not say: 'Come and smell me.'"

Dr. Mott: "But Christ said: 'Preach and Teach,' and also that Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the

word of God. There was a day when I was an unbeliever. Then J. E. K. Studd of Cambridge, a famous cricketer, visited my University on an evangelistic mission and cleared the air for me. His life and splendid example alone would not have answered my question and met my deepest need, but I listened to him and was converted. First and foremost we must live the life; but then by wise and sympathetic unfolding of essential truth we must shed light on processes and actions and attitudes, and remove intellectual difficulties so that it may lead us into the freedom which is freedom indeed. You do not want the Christians to withdraw tomorrow?"

Gandhiji: "No. But I do not want you to come in the way of our work, if you cannot help us."

Dr. Mott: "The whole Christian religion is the religion of sharing our life, and how can we share without supplementing our lives with words?"

Gandhiji: "Then what they are doing in Travancore is correct? There may be a difference of degree in what you say and what they are doing, but there is no difference of quality. If you must share it with the Harijans, why don't you share it with me, Thakkarbapa and Mahadev? Why should you go to the 'untouchables' and try to exploit this upheaval? Why not come to us instead?"

Dr. Mott: "The whole current discussion since the Ambedkar declaration has become badly mixed with other unworthy motives, which must be eliminated. Jesus said: 'Ye shall be witnesses unto Me.' A good Christian has to testify what he has experienced in his own life or as a result of his own observation. We are not true as His followers, if we are not true witnesses of Christ. He said: 'Go and teach and help through the mists and lead them out into larger light.'"

Deenabandhu Andrews here asked to be permitted to put forward a concordat. He said: "There are fundamental differences between you and the Missionaries, and yet you are a friend of the Missionaries. But you feel that they are not playing the game. You want the leaders of the Church to say: 'We do not want to fish in troubled

waters; we shall do nothing to imply that we are taking advantage of a peculiar situation that has arisen.'"

Gandhiji: "I do not think it is a matter which admits of any compromise at all. It is a deeply religious problem and each should do what he likes. If your conscience tells you that the present effort is your mission, you need not give any quarter to Hindu reformers. I can simply state my belief that what the Missionaries are doing today does not show spirituality."

Harijan, 19-12-'36

113

CHRISTIAN HARIJANS

'Christian Harijans' should be a contradiction in terms. For, untouchability that is sought to be driven out of India is the special curse (according to the reformers) or the privilege (according to Sanatanists) of Hinduism. But the Hindu contact has so infected the Christian that at least in Malabar it seems to show itself among Christians almost in the same form as among Hindus. Thus writes a Malabar Christian to Shri Amritlal Thakkar:

> "From the days of the famous Vykom Satyagraha, the real condition of the Travancore Harijans, the worst in India, has been brought to light to a very great extent, but it is not yet suspected or detected, except by a few solitary individuals like Mr C. F. Andrews, that the Christian Harijan in Travancore is, in matter of civic or social rights and in abject poverty, absolutely the same as his Hindu Harijan brother. Pulayas or Cherumas, Pariahs or Sambhavas with Ignaoas or Ina Pulayas and some other minor communities number about 6,00 000 according to the last year's census report and are considered the lowest strata of the outcaste societies of Travancore.
>
> "Converted (Christian) Pulayas or Pariahs as a whole are as good, or as bad, as the others of the communities, except in a few cities like Trivandrum, where the difference, if there is any, exists more in pretention of the converted, though hardly any in reality, and where a handful of them may be a little more literate or little better employed than those of the others.
>
> "Public institutions, roads, inns, rest-houses, temples, churches, court-houses, business-houses, shops, streets and even

taverns that are unapproachable by the one are exactly to the same extent unapproachable by the other. To both, caste men like Nambudris are unseeable to this day.

"Prosperous Christian communities like Nadars in the South and Syrians in the North, who thrived for long in the generations of the Missionaries and State endowments, are to us what no-change Sanatanists are to our Hindu Harijan brother. Hundreds of churches unapproachable by us (Harijan, either Christian or Hindu) will explain why Christian Harijans of the bottom ranks have to make common cause with their fellow outcaste brothers.

"We believe that the innumerable cruelties inflicted upon us by the Caste Hindus and Christians and the inhuman practice of hunting us out of human abodes, especially in Central and North Travancore, not only by touchables but also by untouchables like Ezhavas, are facts too well known to you to need our quoting in this letter specific instances to illustrate the general yet accurate observation made above."

This state of things is no doubt a disgrace to Hinduism but it is no less to Christianity, if not more so.

Harijan, 18-3-'33

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CHRISTIAN HARIJANS

The following Press cutting has been sent to me by Thakkar Bapa :

"'Caste' Catholics Leave Service"

"Kumbakonam — December 14. Tension prevailed yesterday during the Sunday Service in St. Mary's Cathedral, Kumbakonam, consequent upon Catholic Harijans entering in an organized body and distributing themselves amidst the Caste Catholics instead of occupying that portion specifically intended for them. Commotion and uproar followed the Harijans refusing to budge an inch. The situation growing worse, the caste people withdrew from the service expressing determination not to attend until there was a final settlement of the issues involved. The Harijans held a meeting at which it was resolved to continue the fight till equality was secured. The Bishop advised the Harijans to act reasonably, assuring them that the separate accommodation implied no special distinction except for mere convenience. He wanted them not to wound other people's feelings by springing innovations without mutual understanding. Not satisfied with the Bishop's assurance,

the Harijan leaders are carrying out propaganda in the villages urging resistance against what they called caste arrogance and bigotry."

Whether the Harijan is nominally a Christian, Muslim or Hindu and now Sikh, he is still a Harijan. He cannot change his spots inherited from Hinduism so-called. He may change his garb and call himself a Catholic Harijan, or a Muslim Harijan or neo-Muslim or neo-Sikh, his untouchability will haunt him during his lifetime. It is one and the same thing whether you call the numeral after five half a dozen or six. Not until untouchability is removed from Hinduism will the taint be removed from Harijans, no matter what label they adopt.

Harijan, 26-12-'36

115

THE COW AND THE HARIJAN

In my conversation with Dr. Mott, at one stage of it I said, "Would you preach the Gospel to a cow? Well, some of the 'untouchables' are worse than cows in understanding. I mean they can no more distinguish between the relative merits of Islam and Hinduism and Christianity than a cow." Some Missionary friends have taken exception to the analogy. I have no remorse about the propriety of the analogy. There could be no offence meant to Harijans because the cow is a sacred animal. I worship her as I worship my mother. Both are givers of milk. And so far as understanding is concerned I do maintain that there are, be it said to the discredit of superior class Hindus, thousands of Harijans who can no more understand the merits and demerits of different religions than a cow. That after a long course of training Harijans can have their intelligence developed in a manner a cow's cannot, is irrelevant to the present discussion.

Harijan, 9-1-'37

116

THE COW AND THE HARIJANS

Critics seem to say, 'You can have little regard for Harijans, if you compare them to the cow.'

Nevertheless I am unrepentant. I hold that my comparison was as innocuous as it was appropriate. It was innocuous because of the unique place the cow occupies in India. It was appropriate because in the matter of understanding the presentation of Christianity the ordinary Harijan can no more take it in than the cow. That the dullest Harijan can be trained to understand it in course of time, whereas the cow never can, is irrelevant for the simple reason that the discussion related to the present condition, not to future possibility. My point would be better understood if I extend the comparison and say that my five year old grandson, or my sixty-eight year old wife can no more understand the presentation than my cows, though both my wife and my grandson are objects of tender care and attention. I could say of myself that I can no more read the Chinese alphabet today than my worshipful cow. The truth of this last statement is not in any way altered by the fact that if someone began to teach my cow and me the difficult alphabet, I should beat the cow hollow, if the poor, venerable mother ever consented to enter the competition. Let my critics and credulous friends understand that apart from the comparison, I stand on unassailable ground when I assert that it is a travesty of religion to seek to uproot from the Harijans' simple minds such faith as they have in their ancestral religion and to transfer their allegiance to another, even though that other may be as good as and equal to the original in quality. Though all soils have the same predominant characteristics, we know that the same seeds do not fare equally well in all soils. My fear is that though Christian friends nowadays do not say or admit that Hindu religion is untrue, they must harbour in their breasts the belief

that Hinduism is an error and that Christianity as they believe it is the only true religion. One could understand the attack on untouchability and many other errors that have crept into Hindu life. And if they would help us to get rid of the admitted abuses and purify our religion, they would do helpful constructive work which would be gratefully accepted. But so far as one can understand the present effort, it is to uproot Hinduism from the very foundation and replace it by another faith. It is like an attempt to destroy a house which, though badly in want of repair, appears to the dweller quite decent and habitable. No wonder he welcomes those who show him how to repair it and even offer to do so themselves. But he would most decidedly resist those who sought to destroy the house that had served well him and his ancestors for ages, unless he, the dweller, was convinced that the house was beyond repair and unfit for human habitation. If the Christian world entertains that opinion about the Hindu house, 'Parliament of Religions' and 'International Fellowship' are empty phrases. For both the terms presuppose equality of status, a common platform. There cannot be a common platform as between inferiors and superiors, or the enlightened and unenlightened, the regenerate and the unregenerate, the high-born and the low-born, the Casteman and the outcaste. My comparison may be defective, may even sound offensive. My reasoning may be unsound. But my proposition stands.

Harijan, 13-3-'37

117

HARIJANS

> "But as for Harijans themselves, I certainly do not agree that they are stupid, or unintelligent, or lacking in religious sense. They are not even unsophisticated. To me they are just nice people very much like myself and my brothers and sisters and friends. To be sure, they are oppressed and illiterate, even unkempt, but they are thoughtful, spiritual-minded, generous, kindly; in character they seem to me above, rather than below, the average of mankind. I like them better than Savarnas — but that is my bad taste, perhaps.
>
> "I can testify that some of the deepest spiritual thinking, the most exquisite spiritual attainment that I have ever known I have seen in the souls of Depressed Class Hindus, and I don't mean exceptional, educated ones, I mean illiterate villagers.
>
> "Occasionally for information I asked one who was thoroughly familiar with Christian doctrine what he thought of it, pro and con, and he answered me as readily and frankly as if I had asked whether to feed an ox oilcake or *jowari* and why.
>
> "To be sure they talk politics and economics but it is only the spiritual interest that holds them till midnight, brings them back at dawn, and in the hot noonday with the plea, 'If you knew how we want to hear that God loves us, you wouldn't want to rest.'
>
> "If you cannot meet that need, you cannot hold the Depressed Classes, — if you can meet it you will hold them. For that is what they are asking — yes, and Shudras, too, and even some merchants and Brahmanas."

This is an extract from a long letter received from an American sister who has lived for years in India as a Missionary. I heartily endorse the last statement in the extract. Of course, if I cannot meet their spiritual needs, I cannot hold the Harijans. But I am not so stupid as to think that I or any single person can supply the spiritual needs of his neighbour. Spiritual needs cannot be supplied through the intellect or through the stomach, even as the needs of the body cannot be supplied through the spirit. One can paraphrase the famous saying of Jesus and say 'Render unto the body that which is its, and unto the spirit that which is its.' And the only way I can supply my neighbour's spiritual needs is by living the life of the

spirit without even exchanging a word with him. The life of the spirit will translate itself into acts of love for my neighbour. Therefore I have not a shadow of doubt that Hinduism will (and rightly) lose Harijans if the so-called Caste Hindus will not love Harijans — the outcaste Hindus — even as themselves. If they will just do that and nothing else, Hinduism is safe and so are Harijans and they. If they will not, they and Hinduism will surely perish. The so-called high-caste Hindus may spend millions for Harijans, but if they do not do the one thing needful i.e. regard the Harijans as their spiritual equals, the material aid will stink in their nostrils and will be and deserve to be thrown away as so much waste.

But to admit that Harijans have the same spiritual need as the rest of us, is not to say that they would understand the intellectual presentation of Christianity as much as I would, for instance. I put them on the same level as my own wife. Her spiritual needs are no less than mine, but she would no more understand the presentation of Christianity than any ordinary Harijan would. The reason is obvious. We came together practically as children. My studies went on in spite of marriage. She never attended a school before marriage. I neglected her educational training. Presentation, with a view to conversion, of a faith other than one's own, can only necessarily be through an appeal to the intellect or the stomach or both. I do maintain in spite of the extract I have quoted that the vast mass of Harijans, and for that matter Indian humanity, cannot understand the presentation of Christianity, and that, generally speaking, their conversion wherever it has taken place has not been a spiritual act in any sense of the term. They are conversions for convenience. And I have had overwhelming corroboration of the truth during my frequent and extensive wanderings.

Harijan, 12-6-'37

AN UNFORTUNATE DOCUMENT

Fourteen highly educated Indian Christians occupying important social positions have issued a joint manifesto setting forth their views on the Missionary work among Harijans.

The purpose of the manifesto is not to condemn unequivocally the method of converting the illiterate and the ignorant but to assert the *right* of preaching the Gospel to the millions of Harijans. The key to the manifesto is contained in paragraphs 7 and 8. This is what one reads in paragraph 7 :

> "Men and women individually and in family or village groups will continue to seek the fellowship of the Christian Church. That is the real movement of the Spirit of God. And no power on earth can stem that tide. It will be the duty of the Christian Church in India to receive such seekers after the truth as it is in Jesus Christ and provide for them instruction and spiritual nurture. The Church will cling to its right to receive such people into itself from whatever religious group they may come. It will cling to the further right to go about in these days of irreligion and materialism to awaken spiritual hunger in all."

These few sentences are a striking instance of how the wish becomes father to the thought. It is an unconscious process but not on that account less open to criticism. Men and women do not seek the fellowship of the Christian Church. Poor Harijans are not better than the others. I wish they had real spiritual hunger. Such as it is, they satisfy by visits to the temples, however crude they may be. When the missionary of another religion goes to them, he goes like any vendor of goods. He has no special spiritual merit that will distinguish him from those to whom he goes. He does, however, possess material goods which he promises to those who will come to his fold. Then mark, the duty of the Christian Church in India turns into a right. Now when duty becomes a right it ceases to be a duty. Performance of a duty requires one quality — that

of suffering and introspection. Exercise of a right requires a quality that gives the power to impose one's will upon the resister through sanctions devised by the claimant or the law whose aid he invokes in the exercise of his right. I have the duty of paying my debt, but I have no right to thrust the owed coppers (say) into the pocket of an unwilling creditor. The duty of taking spiritual message is performed by the messenger becoming a fit vehicle by prayer and fasting. Conceived as a right, it may easily become an imposition on unwilling parties.

Thus the manifesto, undoubtedly designed to allay suspicion and soothe the ruffled feelings of Hindus, in my opinion, fails to accomplish its purpose. On the contrary it leaves a bad taste in the mouth. I venture to suggest to the authors that they need to re-examine their position in the light of my remarks. Let them recognize the fundamental difference between rights and duties. In the spiritual sphere, there is no such thing as a right.

Harijan, 3-4-'37

119

RIGHTS AND DUTIES

With reference to the above manifesto, an Indian Christian missionary enquired :

" Have I not a moral right to speak ? "

" It is not a moral right but a legal right. There is no right but is legal. Divorced from legality moral right is a misnomer. And therefore you either enforce a right or fight for it. Whereas nobody asserts one's duty. He humbly performs it. I shall take an illustration. You are here. You feel like preaching to me the Gospel. I deny the right and ask you to go away. If you regard praying for me a duty, you will quietly go away and pray for me. But if you claim the right to preach to me, you call the police and appeal to them for preventing my obstructing you. That leads to a clash. But your duty no one dare

question. You perform it here or elsewhere, and if your prayers to God to change my heart are genuine, God will change my heart. What Christianity, according to my interpretation of it, expects you to do is to pray to God to change my heart. Duty is a debt. Right belongs to a creditor, and it would be a funny thing indeed if a devout Christian claimed to be a creditor."

"You have objected to Christian propaganda on the ground that Harijans are illiterate and ignorant. What would you say of propaganda amongst non-Harijans?"

"I have the same objection."

"But," objected the friend, "we do not preach any theology. We simply talk of the life of Christ and tell them what a comfort his life and teaching have been to us. He has been our guide, we say, and ask others also to accept Him as their guide."

"Oh, yes, you do say that. But when you say I must accept Jesus in preference to Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, you will have to go into deep waters. That is why I say, let your life speak to us, even as the rose needs no speech but simply spreads its perfume. Even the blind who do not see the rose perceive its fragrance. This is the secret of the Gospel of the rose. But the Gospel that Jesus preached is more subtle and fragrant than the Gospel of the rose. If the rose needs no agent, much less does the Gospel of Christ need any agent."

Harijan, 17-4-'37

BAD IF TRUE

Shri P. O. Phillip of the National Christian Council has received the following complaint from Travancore:

> "Many thanks for your letter. I am consoled by the fact that the Mahatma will use his influence in removing the ill-feeling of the Caste Hindus in Travancore towards Christians and the Depressed Class converts. Last week, while my evangelist Jacob was returning from a church in North Travancore after the baptism of eight Pariahs, he was stopped by a Hindu Excise (Government) peon and was seriously assaulted. One of his eyes is injured by the blows. The peon said the evangelist had no business to teach and prepare people for baptism after the Temple Entry Proclamation. I have written about this to the *Madras Mail* and the *Manorama* but my note has not appeared in the papers. Will you please give publicity to the hideous act? Such acts are not isolated ones, but are perpetrated with the knowledge of influential Caste Hindus, who want to suppress if possible, the progress of Christianity. You may forward a copy of this note to Mr Gandhi. Communal hatred is on the increase after the Temple Entry Proclamation."

A similar complaint was received by me a few weeks ago through the same source. I have forwarded the papers to the Travancore H. S. Sangh for investigation. Meantime I have the foregoing. The brief postcard contains most serious allegations. The writer claims that

(1) The acts are not isolated;

(2) They are perpetrated with the knowledge of influential Caste Hindus;

(3) Caste Hindus want to suppress if possible the progress of Christianity;

(4) Communal hatred is on the increase after the Temple Entry Proclamation.

Now these statements ought not to be lightly made. I advise the writer to furnish proofs to the Harijan Sevak Sangh who, I promise, will thoroughly investigate the

whole complaint. The Sangh has a retired High Court judge as its President and a most conscientious and cultured man as its Secretary. I myself will have no hesitation in denouncing the slightest departure by Caste Hindus from the strictest non-violence. It is difficult for me to see why communal hatred should be on the increase because of the Temple Entry Proclamation. Certainly I observed none during my recent tour in Travancore. And in so far as specific charges of molestation are concerned I would advise Shri Phillip's correspondent to file complaints in the local courts. I may mention that I received complaints of a contrary nature from Caste Hindus alleging that Harijans living in or near Christian Cheris were molested by Christians. I refused to publish the statements and referred the writers to the local courts. I would have likewise treated the foregoing postcard but for the very serious allegations contained in it. They could only be dealt with publicly and by a public investigation.

Harijan, 17-4-'37

121

HARIJANS ON BEGAR

The newspapers have given publicity to the threat of certain Harijans in certain villages to transfer their allegiance to the Christian Missions seeking to wean them from Hinduism under promise of better treatment, and especially freedom from Begar to which they are subjected by Savarna Hindus. It seems that representatives of the Hindu Mission and of the Harijan Sevak Sangh visited the aggrieved Harijans and got the Savarna Hindus to promise better treatment. The storm has abated for the time being. I do not know what would have been the gain to the Missions concerned if the Harijans had gone over to their fold and how far the Harijans could have been claimed as bonafide converts. This I know that such proselytizing efforts demoralize society, create suspicions and

bitterness and retard the all-round progress of society. If instead of wanting the so-called conversion as the price of better treatment Christian Missions co-operated with Harijan Sevaks in their effort to ease the burdens of Harijans, their help would be welcomed and the evolution of society would be hastened.

Harijan, 1-5-'37

122

TEMPTING HARIJANS

The next question raised at a meeting of Gandhiji with Harijan Sevaks was about the temptations given by missionaries in the shape of books, school fees, etc., with a view to the boys' ultimate conversion. How was one to deal with them ? Gandhiji replied :

" The missionaries have of course the right to preach the gospel of Christ and to invite non-Christians to embrace Christianity. But every attempt to press material benefits or attractions in the aid of conversions should be freely exposed, and the Harijans should be educated to resist these temptations."

Harijan, 1-2-'42

123

UNTOUCHABILITY AND CONVERSION

Q: If the object of the Congress in the liquidation of untouchability is to give Harijans a status of equality with the rest, is this not achieved by their conversion to Islam? Why does the Independence Pledge allocate the programme of the removal of untouchability to the Hindus only? Does this not show that the Congress is anxious to maintain a Hindu majority and therefore denies to the Musalmans their right of conversion?

A: Liquidation of untouchability cannot be attained by the conversion of 'untouchables' to Islam or any other religion. For it is the so-called Caste Hindu who has to rid himself of the sin of untouchability. He can wash away the stain only by doing justice, however tardy, to the outcaste. You will thus see why Muslims are not invited by the Congress to share the burden with the Hindus. They have committed no sin against the 'untouchables'. I cannot prevent you from looking at a simple but necessary social reform as a political dodge to maintain a majority. Tens of thousands of Hindus who are doing penance have no thought of majority. All they want is to do justice to those whom, under the guise of religion, Caste Hindus have reduced to a state worse than slavery. Lastly, you are hopelessly wrong in suggesting that the Congress denies the right to Muslims to convert 'untouchables'. The Congress cannot prevent anybody from doing conversion work. Whether you will exercise the right in the right manner or wrong is for you to consider.

Harijan, 20-4-'40

SECTION ELEVEN : SOCIAL DISABILITIES

124

PARODY OF RELIGION

A Delhi correspondent writes :

"There are about six houses of Chamars in Rohed in the district of Rohtak. These are all labourers and have no property rights in the village land. They used to take water from the village pond so long as it was available. But after that supply failed they were at the mercy of the zamindars for the well-water. The latter would keep them waiting for hours before condescending to issue it to the poor untouchables. Latterly in order to avoid this delay a committee was appointed with a view to devise a remedy. This committee contained one Chamar. It decided that the Chamars should appoint a member of the Mali (gardener) caste to draw water for them and pay him Rs 15 per month. The Chamars were disposed to agree but now they feel that they ought not to pay what is after all a heavy and iniquitous monthly tax upon them. What is one to do? Should the Chamars approach the Government officials for a piece of land to dig their own well?"

What is to be said of the Hindu zamindars who would not have the decency and the ordinary humanity to issue water in due time to men who belong to their own religion and who serve them in hundreds of ways? And all this callousness in the name of religion? If their well is likely to be polluted by the Chamars using them, why will they not pay the gardeners for the luxury of enjoying their exclusiveness? Why will they not give them a plot of land for digging a well in it? Does my correspondent know whether the zamindars have been approached for a plot of land? If a deputation waits on them, they will perhaps not only grant a plot but have a well dug at their expense. If the attempt has not been made, it should be made. Immediate relief may be obtained by securing a piece of land from the Government. But the campaign against untouchability is an attempt to blot it out from Hinduism. No

numbers of separate wells will do it. Hindu reformers have therefore a double task before them to secure relief for the suffering brethren, and to change, by a proper appeal to them, the hearts of those who believe in the evil and savage custom of regarding our own kith and kin as untouchables.

Young India, 22-5-'24

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AT KATHIAWAD

'Untouchable' friends met Gandhiji everywhere, and as a matter of course. Not unoften would a crowd be met, all absolutely barefooted, standing unmoved, in the baking dust of the treeless Kathiawad roads. 'Look yonder at the well where they are drawing water. We may not use that well and we are too poor to construct one ourselves. We are only at liberty to use the cattle trough, attached to the well, and that too when it is filled!' That was the usual complaint. And when no water can be had for drinking, much less may one expect water for bathing and washing! And because they must thus remain unclean, they must necessarily remain untouchable!

The public meeting was held at about eight o'clock. There was a little corner at one end of the meeting where the 'untouchables' were roped off from the rest of the meeting. The proceedings began with a song in praise of Gandhiji composed *ad hoc* by a local poetaster. Then came a dialogue by the school children ending with a spinning demonstration. But it was rather too long-drawn-out and it was not before ten that we came to the business of the day. They were almost asking Gandhiji to start the proceedings, when one of the organizers, feeling that the welcome was not complete without a song by the 'untouchables', insisted on one being sung by the 'untouchable' girls in the corner.

"Stop," said Gandhiji, "before you ask them to sing, I must have a word with you. You must have noticed that my eyes were eagerly fixed all this while on the

'untouchable' friends in the corner. If I allowed myself to listen to the 'untouchable' girls from a distance, the welcome address you have given me on behalf of the Congress Committee would have no meaning and all my pride of calling myself a scavenger and friend of the poor and the 'untouchables' would be as 'sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal'. And what is the meaning of your hurling verses from the Gita at me in your songs in praise of me when you believe not a word of it? If all your praise is really meant I would ask you to permit me to invite the 'untouchables' there to come and sit in your midst. If you think you cannot do so, and that all the welcome you have given me was conventional and not real, you will bravely speak out and say you don't want them. In that case I will be only too glad to go and sit in their midst and speak to you from there. That will be my proper place, and you should not for a moment think that you will hurt or insult me if you ask me to go and sit amongst the 'untouchables'."

The vote was then taken, over a thousand or more voting in favour of admitting the 'untouchables' and about thirty voting against (not one woman amongst them!). "Now" said Gandhiji, "I am between Scylla and Charybdis. There is an overwhelming majority in my favour, and a very small minority against. I must in all humility ask the minority to withdraw and sit somewhere else where they may be free from our pollution. If, however, they feel any offence in my suggstion, I am quite prepared to stand by my original proposal to go and take my place among the 'untouchables'." At this arose one claiming to be the spokesman of the orthodoxy and who was no other than the poetaster who had sung melodiously in praise of Gandhiji.

"I am a Brahmana, sir, and I feel deeply hurt at your suggestion, and I am sure I am voicing the feelings of all who are with me here, when I ask you to go and take your seat amongst the untouchables. We shall listen to you from a distance." "Right," said Gandhiji, "I will.

Now I must say a word to the friends who have voted for me. In a delicate matter like this we can afford to hurt no one, even though we may be within our rights to do as we are doing. I ask you therefore not to insist on the right of the majority, and permit me to seek refuge with the 'untouchables'." "Stop, sir," said a friend with evident tremor in his voice, "it was shameful enough for us to arrange our meeting in that objectionable way. But pray, do not ask us to add to the shame, by suffering you to go and sit among the untouchables." "I understand," said Gandhiji, "that you are deeply hurt. But I am afraid you must thank yourself for it. I could have understood your feelings if you had from the first insisted on having the 'untouchables' in your midst. But you suffered them to be kept at a distance, and awoke to your sense of duty, only at my instance. Pray therefore permit me to go, without offence." And he proceeded towards the subjects of the tragedy standing in the dark, wondering at the strange developments. But another gentleman from amongst the awakened orthodoxy arose and said, addressing the recalcitrant Brahmana spokesman, "It is hardly fair for you to insist on being here. You must understand that as soon as Mahatmaji leaves his seat and goes to the untouchable friends, we are all bound to follow him, and you will be left apart. In either case therefore you cannot be with us. Why then insist on breaking up the meeting for the sake of a few? I beseech you to withdraw." The appeal was not lost on the Brahmana friend, and he withdrew with half a dozen friends, the rest saying that they would go and have a purificatory bath! The 'untouchable' girls were now brought in — not triumphantly for Gandhiji had tabooed all cheering! — and they had their song at about eleven o'clock, and then Gandhiji addressed the meeting in tones of deep pathos and poignancy.

Young India, 16-4-'25

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BENGAL UNTOUCHABLES

A Bengali correspondent asks :

1. "In Bengal the untouchables are not allowed to draw water from the wells, nor are they allowed to enter the room where drinking water is kept. What should be done to remove this evil ? If we dig separate wells for them or establish separate schools, that will be making allowance for this vice.

2. "The mentality of the untouchables in Bengal is that the upper classes should take water from their hands, but they themselves refuse to take water from the hands of those who are below them. What should be done to wean them from the error ?

3. "The Hindu Mahasabha in Bengal and the Hindus in general tell the people that you do not like the idea of taking water from the hands of untouchables."

My answers are :

1. One way of removing the evil is for us to take water from the hands of the 'untouchables'. I do not think that the digging of separate wells for them will perpetuate the evil. It will take a long time to root out the effects of untouchability. It would be wrong to withhold help from the 'untouchables' in the shape of providing them with separate wells for fear of others never letting them use public wells. My belief is that if we build good wells for the 'untouchables' many people will use them. Reform among the 'untouchables' must proceed side by side with breaking down of the prejudice against them by Caste Hindus realizing their duty towards them.

2. When the so-called 'superior' Hindus begin to 'touch' the 'untouchables', the untouchability among the 'untouchables' themselves is bound to die a natural death. Our work must commence with the lowest among the 'untouchables'.

3. I do not know what the Hindu Mahasabha of Bengal has been ascribing to me. My position is clear. 'Untouchables' should be treated as and classed among the Shudras. And since we do take water from the hands of Shudras we should not hesitate to accept it from 'untouchables'.

Young India, 19-2-'25

AT FARIDPUR

Gandhiji sought information about 'untouchability' in Bengal, and he was told about the different sections — Shahas, Kaivartas, Namashudras and Mehtars — and the canker of superiority that had entered even amongst these sub-sections. Then he asked about the disabilities they had to undergo. The gentleman (who was talking to him and was an 'untouchable') admitted that there was no untouchability of the kind we find in West or South India, but the feeling of superiority was there. A Namashudra could enter the house of a 'superior Hindu', but could not enter the room where water was kept; no Hindu would accept water at his hands; he would not be allowed to enter a temple, he could not get the services of a barber or a washerman. "How are we to remedy these disabilities, sir?" he asked.

"That's a nice question that you have asked. Now there are ways and ways. There are some who would use violence against the offending party and wrest reform from them. I met such friends in Poona. They wanted to present an address to me. In the address they said that if the higher classes did not mend their behaviour towards them, they would use physical force and teach them a lesson. That is one way. I told them that that was the surest way to lose all sympathy of sober men and to defeat the ends they wanted to achieve, as also to frustrate the efforts of the reformers to help them. There is another class of people — I met them in the South — who threaten to leave Hinduism and take to Christianity or Islam. I said to them that if they had any religion in them, it was only now that it was on trial and if they renounced it because they were ill-treated their religion was not worth a moment's purchase. I was ex-communicated, and I think wrongly, when I went to England, but for that reason should I have

renounced my religion? The third way and the only pure way, to my mind, is that of self-purification, i.e. being free from all the charges that are levelled against you."

"I understand it all. Violence and the kind of threats you have described are no good," echoed the Vakil friend.

"Yes. Self-purification is the way. What little there may be of the idea of superiority among yourselves you must get rid of. Try to rid yourselves of all that the orthodox Hindus have perhaps with some reason to say against you and you will overcome their prejudices. Not that they have no vices. But it is not yours to point the finger of scorn at them. It may be a long process, but it is a sure one. I know you can bring them to their knees by drastic measures at times. In cities like Calcutta for instance, if the sweepers go on strike saying that they would not resume work unless their disabilities are remedied, I am sure they would succeed, but the minds of the opposite party will not be changed. Their hatred will increase all the more. The only way is to be above reproach yourselves and leave the rest to reformers. As you know I am fighting the evil with all the energy at my command. It is an entirely religious question for me."

"You want me to trust the reformers. We trust you, but how may we trust the others? They talk of untouchability today because we are useful pawns in their political game, but the moment their political ends are achieved, they will leave us in the lurch. We do not think, in their heart of hearts they believe that it is a question of purifying themselves, nor that Swaraj is useless without the removal of untouchability.

"Do you want us simply to rely on the reformers? You know it has so happened that whenever we have shown fight they have come down, and whenever we have sat supine they have looked on with unconcern. —— says we should refuse to have anything to do with them. Let us also refuse all social intercourse, let us refuse water from them as they refuse water from us."

"Don't do anything of the kind. You will antagonize the Caste Hindus all the more. You may not feel any love

for them. But I do think you can rid yourselves of all hatred against them. Maintain a dignified attitude. Dignified attitude and not vindictiveness."

Young India, 14-5-'25

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INVERTED UNTOUCHABILITY

A correspondent writes :

"Perhaps you do not know that some of the 'untouchables' themselves labour under a sense of sin attaching to the act of touching a 'touchable', or approaching within a particular distance of him, or drawing water from his well, or entering his temple, or doing any such thing in relation to the 'touchable' — though allowed and even invited to do so. The 'untouchable' thinks that he would be transgressing his Maryada and be guilty of sin in doing any such acts. This is the inverse of the untouchability usually so-called and known to obtain amongst the higher castes (touchable and untouchable) against the lower ones. This is untouchability upside down. It may be the case — and the touchables may flatter themselves with the thought — that this sort of untouchability (little known, but as strong as the other) is not retaliatory in spirit. All the same it is there, and even the special correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* who interviewed you in Sabarmati Jail and toured India in 1922, noted it in Anand and Bardoli talukas in Gujarat. What, I wonder, is the remedy you would advise anti-untouchability workers to adopt to cure the 'untouchables' of this inverse of untouchability ? Is this also sin like the other sort ? Does not the so-called Maryada-Dharma come in our way here ? Is it possible for a conscientious 'untouchable' believer in this Dharma to rescue a drowning Brahmana whom he otherwise could ?"

I am not unaware of the atrocious result of untouchability observed by the correspondent. Sometimes I find it difficult to make the 'untouchables' approach me, much less to touch me. I do not believe that it is a question primarily of religion with the 'untouchables' not to touch the 'touchables'. They simply do not realize the possibility of touching those who have hitherto regarded them as untouchables. In the majority of cases, therefore, it is fear that deters the 'untouchables' even under permission

from touching the 'touchables'. The case is on a par with that of the French prisoner who, having been for years locked up in the dungeons of Bastille could not, when discharged, bear the light of day. He had almost lost the sense of light. But I have come across in Bengal a suggestion made to the so-called untouchables that they should, by way of retaliation, regard the so-called higher class Hindus as untouchables, refuse to them all the services they are now rendering and refuse also water or food at their hands. I should deplore the day when such retaliation comes. But in this age of freedom and also licence, it need cause no surprise if what is now an object of mere talk is translated into action and retaliation descends upon the devoted heads of the so-called higher classes. Nature gives us ninety nine chances of reform and if we do not take advantage of any of them, the hundredth time she compels obedience and accompanies it with a punishment which at least makes us feel uneasy.

Young India, 21-5-'25

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GROSS INJUSTICE

I had a very long discussion with many of the Ezhava leaders this afternoon, and I tell you that if I was not told that they were Ezhavas I should not have known them to be such, nor could I see the slightest distinction between them and those who call themselves Savarnas. Their pecuniary position is any day better than that of many of the Savarnas. Their educational qualifications leave nothing to be desired, and their personal cleanliness appeared to be infinitely superior to that of many Brahmanas and others whom I have seen during my travels from one end of the country to the other. And so when I faced these friends and read their address, I hung my Hindu head in shame, that these friends were considered untouchable and unfit to walk along some of the public roads in Travancore, and that these were the friends whose presence in our temples

would defile the temple ground, and that these were the men who could not send their sons and daughters to at least some of the Government schools although they were as much taxpayers as the tallest in this assembly. For let it be remembered that as against these inhuman disabilities, they are not excused from paying the tax in the same measure that Savarnas pay to the State. This then is in my opinion a cause to which it is the duty of many Hindus who feel for their religion to dedicate their lives.

[From a speech in Alleppey]

Young India, 20-10-'27

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UNTOUCHABILITY DYING BUT NOT DEAD

This deadly snake of untouchability is scotched but not destroyed. It shows its poisonous fangs even when you may least expect to see them. I was certainly not prepared for the following letter :

> "I regret very much to bring to your kind notice, the following fact which occurred soon after the ladies' meeting held at Tanuku on the 22nd instant. At about 5 p.m. there were present three to four hundred ladies in the meeting. It was whispered by some in the meeting that the young lady who was sitting by you was a Panchama girl.
>
> "As soon as the meeting was over, all the ladies who attended the meeting directly went to the canal and took a plunge in the water to purify themselves from the unpardonable sin of touching free. I saw with my own eyes even small children, nay more, suckling babies too were sprinkled with holy water to save them also from this sin. We are deceiving you and honouring you. It is a pious ancient fraud with us....
>
> "People are steeped in ignorance and superstition. These combined with the pride of higher caste are ruining us and seem to be more powerful even than the present Government."

As it so happens the young lady sitting by me was no other than Shrimati Prabhavati Devi, the daughter of Brijakishore Babu, the well-known leader of Bihar. She has been with me in the Ashram for some time and has been travelling with me during the Andhra tour. By the

vast majority of the people she has been taken to be my daughter, by some to be daughter-in-law, but it was reserved for the Tanuku ladies to confound her with Lakshmi, the Antyaj girl, whom I have adopted as my daughter in my own manner. And so being polluted by the touch transmitted through me of the imaginary Antyaj girl the good ladies purified themselves and their children by a holy bath or a mere sprinkling. This tragic comedy has a lesson for us. Superstitious themselves, men having neglected the womenfolk, have allowed the latter to remain in darker superstition. After I got the letter, I became circumspective and began an examination of the composition of subsequent audiences. I found that at most meetings the 'untouchables' were intermingled with the touchables. I asked the audience point-blank whether they had any objection. And they said they had none. At one of the villages near Rajahmundry I saw at a well-arranged meeting volunteers pointing with pride to the touchables, 'untouchables' and women in their respective wards. I set a trap for them. "I suppose you have specially arranged this in order to isolate the 'untouchables'?" The poor volunteer who answered my question readily fell into the trap and said, "Yes, sir." I discovered afterwards that he knew very little English and had not understood my question. For I straightway asked the audience whether they had any objection to 'untouchables' sitting in their midst. They showed by a chorus of hands that they had none. I was still not satisfied and therefore asked whether they would have me send the 'untouchables' in their midst. They again raised their hands signifying assent. I asked them to signify the same with their voice. And they did so, at first softly. I asked for a loud-voiced declaration. And all sung out at the top of their voices '*sarey, sarey* *.' Then I invited the 'untouchables' to sit in their midst which they did without any hesitation and without any fear. Then I based my speech to the meeting on untouchability telling them that they had done a meritorious

* All right. Ed.

act by letting the 'untouchable' brethren sit in their midst, and that it was a sin to regard any human being as an untouchable. If in spite of this ocular demonstration enforced by the explanation that I gave, the women or anybody had a purificatory bath, it will be a question for a psycho-analyst to dissect and consider. Let me finish this story by adding that the women also had taken part in signifying their assent to the 'untouchable' intermingling, and as a matter of fact the so-called untouchables sat with Caste men and women touching both without my noticing any movement on the part of anybody to avoid them. In a village nearby, a school is being conducted where both touchable and 'untouchable' boys associate in large numbers without any friction. And so while I deplore occurrences such as happened at Tanuku, the fact cannot be gainsaid that untouchability is fast dying of exhaustion.

Young India, 16-5-'29

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OUR SINS

It is well to remind ourselves of what wrong we have heaped upon the devoted heads of the Harijans. Socially they are lepers. Economically they are worse than slaves. Religiously they are denied entrance to places we miscall 'houses of God'. They are denied the use, on the same terms as the Caste Hindus, of public roads, public schools, public hospitals, public wells, public taps, public parks and the like. In some cases their approach within a measured distance is a social crime, and in some other rare enough cases their very sight is an offence. They are relegated for their residence to the worst quarters of cities and villages where they practically get no social service. Caste Hindu lawyers and doctors will not serve them as they do other members of society. Brahmanas will not officiate at their religious functions. The wonder is that they are at all able to eke out an existence or that they still remain within the Hindu fold. They are too downtrodden to rise

in revolt against their suppressors. I have recalled these tragic and shameful facts in order to make the workers vividly realize the implications of the Yeravda Pact. It is only ceaseless effort that can raise these downtrodden fellow beings from degradation, purify Hinduism, and raise the whole Hindu society and with it the whole of India.

My Soul's Agony (1933), 5-11-'32, pp. 9-10

132

TO SANATANISTS

Almost every letter that I have received from the Sanatanists makes these agreeable startling admissions :

1. We admit that there is much to be done for the amelioration of the Harijans.

2. We admit that many Caste Hindus are ill-treating the Harijans.

3. We admit that Harijan children should receive education.

4. We admit that Harijans should have better quarters to live in.

5. We admit that they should have proper arrangements for bathing and drawing water for themselves.

6. We admit that they should have full political rights.

7. We admit that they should have ample facilities for worship ; and

8. We admit that they should have all the civic rights that the others have.

"But," say the Sanatanists, "we must not be compelled to touch them or associate with them, especially whilst they are in their present condition."

Then I say to them, "Since you admit the necessity for putting them on the same level with you, why are you agitated when other Caste Hindus will go a step further and

believe, on the strength of the same Shastras that you believe in, that it is their duty not to regard the Harijans as untouchables but to have them share with themselves all those rights and privileges which you concede to them but which you would have them to enjoy and exercise in isolation from you. Surely you, who want to guard your own liberty of action and rightly resent the very idea of coercion, will not desire that the reformers should be coerced into carrying out schemes of amelioration which you hold to be necessary in exactly the same manner as you would like.

"I venture to suggest a better way. Since you are at one with the reformers in conceding the desirability of ameliorating the condition of the Harijans, and since you have not hitherto done anything tangible in that direction, subscribe liberally to the funds that the reformers are collecting, and use them as your agents for carrying out the common scheme and respect their interpretation of Hindu religion as you would have them to respect yours. Hitherto in practice, you have not resented the reformer's action in associating with the Harijans. You have suffered him to go his own way. You have not boycotted him. There is then no meaning in your opposition now, simply because the movement has become more active and more universal than before."

One difficulty still stands in the way. Who is to have the use of public temples and other public institutions that are in existence and from which Harijans are at present debarred, in some cases legally, and in other far more numerous cases illegally? The Sanatanists, or the reformers together with the Harijans? There is a very simple way out of the difficulty. If only each party will shed anger and mutual disrespect, a referendum can easily be taken for each village or a group of villages and each city or each division of a city, and whichever party has the majority in favour of its view should make use of the public institutions including temples. And if the Sanatanists carry the majority with them they should defray their share with the reformers of the cost of providing equal services for

the reformers and the Harijans. I bracket the reformers with the Harijans, for if they are worth their salt and will work up to their convictions, as time progresses the duty must dawn upon them of denying to themselves the use of a single service which the Harijans cannot enjoy with Caste Hindus on absolutely equal terms. Following out this train of reasoning the Sanatanists will see that in justice they should bear the whole cost of bringing into being parallel services because, as I have understood the correspondence and as I have explained above, the Sanatanists agree that the Harijans are entitled to the same services that they have hitherto enjoyed and of which Harijans have hitherto been deprived.

Let not the Sanatanists run away with themselves by picturing a condition of things as existing, but which in reality does not exist. Let them clearly understand that removal of untouchability, in accordance with the Yeravda Pact and with the declaration of the recently formed Servants of Untouchables Society, includes no more than I have narrated. It does not include interdining and intermarriage. That many Hindus, including myself, would go much further ought not to disturb the Sanatanists. They will not want to stifle private judgement or private action, and if they have deep faith in what they believe, they should not take fright in anticipation of what is to come. If a particular reform has inherent vitality and has come in response to the needs of the time, no power on earth can stem its irresistible march.

My Soul's Agony (1933), 16-11-'32; pp. 49-52

PLIGHT OF SCAVENGERS

Vile Parle, a suburb of Bombay, is inhabited by well-to-do Hindus, among others. The suburb has in round figures 1,700 villas or houses. The Municipality has an income of Rs 70,000, of which Rs 31,000 are spent for conservancy. The scavengers are accommodated in quarters where there are no roads, no arrangement for water supply, and no sanitary convenience. The land itself is low-lying. The huts are hovels constructed from dilapidated tins which were once used for conservancy work. There is no lighting. Nearby is the dumping ground for the suburban rubbish, which gives an eternal stench. Next to it is a structure for housing conservancy motor-lorries. Attached to this is a waterpipe for washing dirty tins, and if the overseer is well disposed, he would allow the scavengers to help themselves to water from this pipe. On the other side is a row of carts that receive the buckets collected from the privies of householders. It is in these surroundings that the scavengers have to pass their life. These quarters are surrounded by fields which are often under water, breeding mosquitoes, harbouring scorpions, snakes and field rats. Thirtyone families live in this condition. They are composed of thirtyfive men, twentyfive women, thirtyfour boys and fifteen girls. Of this population of one hundred and nine, only nine boys can at all read and write with difficulty. The rest are utterly illiterate.

This is a suburb where the inhabitants, if they had any thought for these fellow-beings of theirs, could well afford to provide for them decent accommodation in decent quarters with water, lighting and all the other conveniencies which are part of the city life. There is work here for both the Sanatanists and the reformers. It would be no answer to my complaint that the Vile Parle Municipality has an income of only Rs 70,000 out of which it spends the princely sum of Rs 31,000 on conservancy. I know that the inhabitants of Vile Parle are well-to-do enough to tax

themselves specially on behalf of these useful servants of society, but I would regard that as a slow process. It is the primary duty of the Hindu inhabitants to make decent collections overnight and provide suitable quarters and other conveniences for the scavengers. If they do so it would even then be a tardy performance of a very simple duty done to their fellowmen. When they have done this, there would be point in their moving the Municipality to take up the burden of additional annual expenditure that would undoubtedly have to be incurred in order to enable the scavengers to live in comparative comfort.

My Soul's Agony (1933), 17-11-'32; pp. 57-58

134

VACATE KAVITHA

Shri A. V. Thakkar says in a letter received last week:

"The Associated Press announced on the 10th instant that the Caste Hindus of Kavitha agreed to admit Harijan boys to the village school in Kavitha and that matters were amicably settled. This was contradicted on the 13th inst. by the Secretary of the Ahmedabad Harijan Sevak Sangh, who said in his statement that the Harijans had undertaken (privately of course) not to send their children to the school. Such an undertaking was not given voluntarily, but was extorted from them by the Caste Hindus, in this case the Garasiyas of the village, who had proclaimed a social boycott against poor Harijans — weavers, Chamars and others, who number over 100 families. They were deprived of agricultural labour, their animals of grazing in the pasture land, and their children of buttermilk. Not only this, but a Harijan leader was compelled to take an oath by Mahadev that he and others would not hereafter even make an effort to reinstate their children in the school. The so-called settlement was brought about in this way.

"But even after the bogus settlement reported on the 10th and the complete surrender by poor Harijans the boycott was not lifted up to the 19th and partly up to the 22nd from the weavers. It was lifted somewhat earlier from the head of the Chamars, as Garasiyas themselves could not remove the carcasses of their dead animals, and thus had to come to terms with the Chamars earlier. As if the enormities perpetrated so far were not enough, kerosene was poured into the Harijans' well, once on the 15th inst. and again on the 19th inst. One can imagine what terrorism was

thus practised on poor Harijans because they had dared to send their children to sit alongside of the 'princely' Garasiya boys.

"I met the leaders of the Garasiyas on the morning of the 22nd. They said that they could not tolerate the idea of boys of Dheds and Chamars sitting by the side of their own boys. I met also the District Magistrate of Ahmedabad on the 23rd with a view to finding out if he would do something to ease the situation, but without any result.

"Harijan boys are thus practically banned from the village school with nobody to help them. This has caused despondency among the Harijans to such an extent that they are thinking of migrating in a body to some other village."

There is no help like self-help. God helps those who help themselves. If the Harijans concerned will carry out their reported resolve to wipe the dust of Kavitha off their feet, they will not only be happy themselves but they will pave the way for others who may be similarly treated. If people migrate in search of employment, how much more should they do so in search of self-respect? I hope that well-wishers of Harijans will help these poor families to vacate inhospitable Kavitha.

Harijan, 5-10-'35

135

A LITTLE INCIDENT

One morning when I went to Segaon, I found Gandhiji busy pulling to pieces a hair-cropping machine, in order to clean and oil it. That done he began having a crop with his own hands with a mirror in front of him.

At the same moment one of the devotees of the Sadhu came in, and he happened to be a barber. "Bapuji", shouted the Sadhu from the opposite corner, "let Bhima crop your hair. He knows the art."

"But how does he know it?"

"He is a barber by profession."

"Ah, that is very good. Come along then."

But as soon as Bhima began the operation, Gandhiji asked him: "But I hope you have no prejudice against shaving our Harijan brethren. Have you?"

He hesitated slightly, and said, "I have in my heart no prejudice against Harijans."

"That I can believe. But will you shave a Harijan on the same terms as you would shave me?"

Again he hesitated. Thereupon Gandhiji said to the Sadhu: "I thought you had ascertained this thing from him before you asked me to have his services."

"I am sorry," said the Sadhu, "that aspect had for the moment escaped me."

"Then I shall have to consider whether I should stop in the middle of the crop and dispense with Bhima."

But Bhima said: "No, though I do not usually do it, I promise from now to serve Harijans on the same terms."

Gandhiji was agreeably surprised. Bhima finished the operation neatly and explained that he had been in jail during the Nagpur National Flag Satyagraha and that while in jail he used to shave everyone without prejudice. Outside he had yielded to the popular prejudice, but he would no longer do so.

M. D.

Harijan, 15-8-'36

136

BEGAR

The system of forced labour exacted by petty landowners from Harijans and other classes called backward is almost universal in India. The petty landlords are mostly Hindus. Harijans and others can legally resist forced labour. They are slowly but surely being awakened to a sense of their rights. They are numerous enough to enforce them. But all grace will be gone when Savarna Hindus impotently resign themselves to their merited fate. Better surely by far if they will recognize their duty of regarding Harijans as blood-brothers, entitled to the respect that belongs to man and to receive due payment for services voluntarily performed.

It is the privilege of Harijan Sevaks, no matter to what organization they belong, to befriend Harijans, to study

their condition in detail, to approach Savarna Hindus and show them as gently as possible what their duty is towards those whom they have treated as outcastes of society and deprived even of legal rights.

From the papers before me I further find that in Ode and some other villages in Gujarat the Savarna Hindus take from Harijans who dispose of their dead cattle half the hide. This is unlike the usual practice of allowing the Harijans to own the dead cattle they remove. In some cases Harijans not only retain the dead cattle they remove, but receive a payment for the labour of removing carcasses. The matter demands more investigation and fair adjustment. If Harijans were better treated and if Savarna Hindus had no horror of dead cattle and had no superstitious laws of pollution, they would learn the art of flaying the dead cattle and turning every part of the carcasses into wealth, both to the benefit of themselves and the Harijans whom they may invite to help them in the process of disposing of their dead cattle.

Harijan, 1-5-'37

137

THE POLICE AND HARIJANS

[With reference to a report of serious ill-treatment of Nallathur Harijans by Caste Hindus and the indifferent and callous attitude of the police on that occasion, Gandhiji wrote as follows: Ed.]

The police belonging to the lowest grade should be taught that they have to serve Harijans equally with the others. Harijans ought to be able to feel that during the Congress regime at least they can get justice.

Harijan, 9-9-'39

138

UNTOUCHABILITY

Shri T. S. Jadhav, President District Local Board, Sholapur, writes

"I have been incessantly making effort to give facilities to the Harijans especially with regard to their immediate needs in respect of water supply, education, etc. The Congress Board has opened a good number of wells to the Harijans, and has also arranged to put up notices to that effect at these wells. But it is a matter of regret that the Harijans are not inclined to take advantage of this facility for fear of being put to trouble by the 'touchables'. During my tours in the district, I have been requesting the latter to allow Harijans the exercise of this legitimate right without any ill effects and exhorting the Harijans to have sufficient courage to establish their fundamental right of drinking water from any public well. This I have been doing through public meetings, articles and private discussions. As a practical instance, I go myself to a public well in a village after a public meeting with some Harijans, 'touchable' Congress workers, and a few other prominent villagers, and all of us drink water from the well after it has been drawn by a Harijan. But it is found that the 'touchables' who take part in this function are often boycotted and the Harijans visited with various kinds of troubles by the 'touchables' who do not participate in the function. No doubt the nature of this boycott and that of the infliction of troubles is becoming milder and milder day by day; but in whatever form it may be, it is there and serves as a hindrance in the way of removal of untouchability. Can you suggest anything more?"

This certainly is good work. Removal of untouchability is a question of double education, that of 'touchables' as well as 'untouchables'. 'Touchables' have to be taught patiently by precept and example that untouchability is a sin against God and humanity, and the 'untouchables' that they should cease to fear the 'touchables' and shed untouchability among themselves. I know that that is very easily said. But I have found nothing else. Living in the midst of both, I know how hard the work is among both. If Hinduism is to live, the work has to be done, however difficult and even hopeless it may appear to be.

Harijan, 8-6-'40

139

HARIJANS OF GARHWAL

Only the other day I had the good fortune to report a case of a Harijan bride being carried in a Palkhi or Dandi in Garhwal without let or hindrance. But Shri Shyamlal of the Harijan Sevak Sangh informs me that the case has proved to be an exception, and that prevention of the use of a Dandi by Harijans flourishes almost as before. Two such cases have come under his observation only recently. Harijans who had dared to make use of Dandis were 'mercilessly beaten'. There is an awakening among Harijans. They have approached the Commissioner for protection which he has promised if a fortnight's previous notice is given to him. But that means more bad blood. The real thing required is conversion of the Caste Hindus. Let us hope that the labours of the reformers will bear fruit and Harijans will no longer need police protection. But they need not wait for the success of the reformers' labours. They must assert their right even if it be by seeking police protection.

Harijan, 15-6-'40

140

WITH HARIJAN SEVAKS

Gandhiji met Harijan Sevaks in Bardoli and answered their questions. The first question asked was about wells:

"Should we seek the co-operation of Harijans, and if so, to what extent?"

"Co-operation," said Gandhiji, "is necessary, but we must not take the Harijans in a body and invade the Savarna quarters. We should visit the wells, ascertain the classes of people using them, and reason with these to let the Harijans use them. Regarding Local Board wells the help of officials may be freely sought, and such Harijans may be asked to go and use the wells as may be prepared to stand ill-treatment. But the brunt should be borne by

the Sevaks, care being taken to stand between the Harijans and those who would threaten to molest or belabour them. The Harijans should be invariably asked to use clean vessels and observe all the ordinary rules of cleanliness. We can also dig wells for Harijans and invite the Savarnas to use them. It is likely that the Harijans may be boycotted, but we should see that they get employment elsewhere. The Harijans have to be taught to learn to assert themselves firmly and non-violently, and the Savarnas may be gently reminded that injustice cannot last for ever. These are broad principles, but everyone has to take measures suited to the circumstances in each case."

Q: "Can't we insist on the admission of Harijan boys to hostels where *all* non-Harijan Hindu boys are admitted ?"

A: "Of course, but care should be taken to see that the hostel is not exclusively for a particular community or section of Hindus. Where all sections are admitted and only the Harijans are excluded, the workers should strain every nerve to get the Harijans admitted."

Harijan, 1-2-'42

141

THE CURSE

A Harijan Sevak writes :

"1. There are in our country hotels, hair-cutting saloons, etc., which deny admission to Harijans. Is it not expected of our national workers — Khadi, Hindi and Congress propagandists — to boycott such institutions and use their influence to get these disabilities of the Harijans removed ?

"2. There are washermen employed by the A. I. S. A. Some of these washermen observe untouchability in their profession and are not prepared to wash the clothes belonging to persons other than Brahmanas and Nairs. The A. I. S. A. dispenses with the washermen who are addicted to drink. Similarly, should not the A. I. S. A. dispense with those washermen who observe untouchability in their profession ?"

The questions are appropriate. Both have to be answered only in one way. All institutions which deny

access to Harijans should be boycotted by those, whether Congressmen or others, who feel keenly that the curse of untouchability has to be removed if Hinduism is to remain as a faith to live for and, if need be, to die for. In the posers put by the Sevak the difficulty is sometimes serious. But nothing can be achieved unless serious difficulties are seriously faced and surmounted.

The question gives rise to a dilemma on some occasions. The washermen are supported by the A. I. S. A. in common with the other artisans. These cling to untouchability with a tenacity that defies all attempt to make them see the superstition that the curse is. Whilst I cannot offhand ask A. I. S. A. workers to boycott the artisans that observe untouchability, there is no doubt that there should be greater vigilance than heretofore in those matters. Preference should certainly always be given to those who have shed the superstition. Much will depend upon the spirit in which the persons afflicted with the virus of untouchability are approached.

Harijan, 29-3-'42

142

PERSECUTION OF HARIJANS

Shri Parikshitlal Mazumdar writes :

"There was high mortality due to some epidemic in a village in Wadhwan State, Kathiawad. The superstition of the villagers ascribed this misfortune to Harijans and they began to intimidate the Bhangi families. The latter fled from the village through fright. Harijan workers, as soon as they learnt of the incident, approached the State authorities to take immediate steps to protect the Bhangis and did their level best to dispel the superstition from the minds of the ignorant villagers. The State acted promptly and the families returned. This year Kathiawad Harijans have had to suffer more than usual because of the outbreak of disease among cattle. These poor folk have to pay dearly for the superstition of the villagers."

The only remedy for this kind of superstition is the spread of correct knowledge. The reason for its existence in Kathiawad seems to be that the reform movement has not

yet touched the villages there. Workers must make Herculean efforts to remedy the defect. But wherefrom are such workers to come? Even those already working in Kathiawad fight shy of going to the villages. And even if they go, one can well imagine the immense difficulty of the task confronting them. Man's endeavour at its highest consists in continuing to perform one's duty undeterred by difficulties. The Kathiawad incident must be taken to heart. Both the State and the people understood their duty and took prompt and firm measures in the instance quoted and the difficulty was surmounted for the time being. If this example were to be widely followed it would cut at the very root of superstition. And that would be true education.

Harijan, 17-3-'46

143

NO COMPULSION

An evil like untouchability which has found its way to the very marrow of the people's bones, and that too in the name of religion, cannot be removed forcibly. The Congress has not established its position through force. It is a purely democratic organization. Therefore, it is hoped that the Congress Ministers will educate public opinion and win popular support for all its progressive measures. This should result in an impetus to reforms like Harijan work in their province and the forces standing in the way of such reforms would automatically disappear. Moreover, intensive work in a limited area is likely to prove very fruitful. We cannot reach the whole of India at one and the same time. Wherever the workers have the requisite ability and influence, the work will proceed at a quicker pace. Sound work in a small area is therefore likely to be copied by others and thus lead to an early success.

Harijan, 9-6-'46

144

HARIJANS AND WELLS

Shri Hardev Sahay writes:

"Last evening (4-9-'46) in your address to the prayer gathering, you drew the attention of the public to the disability attached to Harijans in the matter of drawing water from public wells. After 25 years of incessant effort on their behalf, we have not yet succeeded in removing this disability. No one knows of their suffering more than you.

"It is my humble opinion that now that Congress Governments are in power, they should forthwith proclaim their policy towards the Harijans and remove all such of their disabilities as they can by law. In this connection I should like to draw your attention to conditions in the Punjab. Leave aside the question of drawing water from wells, Harijans are not even permitted to obtain land for sinking a well for themselves. I would beg of you to appeal to the Punjab Government to provide wells for Harijans at State expense, wherever there are no facilities of drawing water or at least provide them with land for sinking wells for themselves. There are ever so many villages in the Punjab where, even if the Harijans are willing to spend their own money, they are not given the requisite land.

"There are a few places where the Government has started making wells for the Harijans; but they are wholly insufficient. It is surely the duty of the State to see that a proper supply of drinking water is available to all its citizens."

The writer is perfectly right in what he says. It is the duty of the Government to provide wells for the Harijans. It is not enough only to give the land; the Government should be responsible for sinking the wells.

[From *Harijansevak*]

Harijan, 15-9-'46

145

THE LAW IN REGARD TO WELLS

Shri G. Ramachandra Rao writes a letter giving an account of his Harijan work. The following is a precis of it :

"We have taken up the problem of the use of public wells by Harijans. Section 126A of the Madras Local Boards Act of 1920 provides for the use, by persons of whatever caste or creed, of wells, tanks, reservoirs, water-ways, etc. maintained by a Panchayat. It even imposes a fine of Rs 100 on anyone who obstructs its operation. But the law is honoured in the breach where the Harijans are concerned. It is pathetic to see the latter often waiting in long queues for hours at a time in front of a public well for some generous non-Harijan to fill their pots with water. We chose Kankipadu village where a public well is maintained by the local Panchayat and explained to the leaders, not only the implications of the law but also their moral obligations. The response, after about three weeks of propaganda, being heartening, we called a public meeting where, owing to overwhelming support for the proposition, it was announced that in future Harijans would be allowed to use the well in question without molestation.

"The next morning, however, the Harijans themselves were found to be too timid to take advantage of the decision. It was a sad commentary on their mentality and we had to work hard to bring them to the well. As soon as they began drawing water, a reaction set in among the Caste Hindus, the vast majority of whom, even at personal inconvenience, refrained from coming to the well. A few, however, remained staunch to their resolve and gradually the opposition was worn down. I had also to appeal to the Deputy Inspector of Local Board to explain to the people the implications of section 126A.

"This experience has encouraged us to take up similar work in other villages too, where Harijans have no facilities for obtaining water. I am of opinion that for the removal of such disabilities, moral persuasion and legal provision should go hand in hand. Absence of one renders the other inefficient. The existing Government acts dealing with social disabilities are vague and weak. This defect must be remedied and the Government of Madras, who have set aside one crore of rupees for Harijan work, might well utilize a certain sum for publicity of the provisions of the relevant laws already on the statute book. Execution of the law is as important as its passing."

Professor Rao deserves hearty congratulations for his assiduous work on behalf of the oppressed Harijans. His effort ought to be supported by the public.

Harijan, 15-9-'46

146

PROUD OR INSANE?

As I write these lines in sorrow, the picture that comes before my mind is not of proud but of insane Gujarat.

Shri Parikshitlal is a servant of the Harijans. He aspires in that capacity to serve Gujarat but is baffled by the madness that has seized her people. One hears of *living* Harijans, but in Parikshitlal's story, Harijans *dead* are also untouchables. On the cremation ground, at any rate, there should be no distinction between man and man. Once the dead body is reduced to ashes, all uncleanliness vanishes. In spite of this, must Harijans be excluded from the common cremation ground? After much difficulty the Mahajans of Navsari were persuaded to permit the body of an old Harijan to be cremated on the common ground. As a matter of fact, there was neither room for favour on one side nor for rejoicing on the other. But one has, at times, to be thankful for small mercies. It is well that the agitation in this case bore fruit.

The other instance is an unmixed tragedy. I do not propose to give the name of the village where it took place. The despicable part of it is that even if an epidemic breaks out among the cattle, it is the poor Harijans who are held responsible. The so-called Caste Hindus will not take the trouble even to see the obvious cause of the disease. Grass grows in abundance during the rainy season. It is infested with all kinds of insects. The starved cattle go mad at the sight of green grass and devour it, insects and all. Is it any wonder that they fall ill and die? The cause of the epidemic is obvious. The cattle of the Harijans suffer no less and yet the latter are held responsible for the calamity. They are subjected to maltreatment in the shape of abuse

and assault from the Caste Hindus. This, in brief, is the gist of a woeful tale, described in a letter before me. How I wish that my words could reach the ears of the villagers concerned !

Now that reformers are at the helm of Government, much of the terrible ignorance of the villagers could be dispelled, if only the officials would make the effort. If the Mahajans shed their superstition and the Government and Harijan workers do their duty and the Harijans are roused from their slumbers, it will be possible to deliver Gujarat from this dreadful evil.

[From *Harijanbandhu*]

Harijan, 22-9-'46

147

HOW TO REMOVE UNTOUCHABILITY

Q : A Madras Harijan writes that while removing the ban on temple entry and on use of public wells, giving scholarships for education etc. are all good in their own way, the real way to remove all traces of the curse of untouchability is to abolish Cheris and separate living quarters for Harijans.

A : It sounds well to say that untouchability will go by the board if Harijans are allowed to live wherever they choose. So far as I am aware there is no general law in existence which relegates Harijans to living in special quarters. It is an evil custom that forces them to do so. The custom is breaking down but very very slowly. Meantime it is the duty of everyone to get rid of it. It is a question of moving the hearts of people. Supreme sacrifice can achieve the desired result. Has not Tulsidas said :

> " Through sacrifice Brahma created the world,
> " Through sacrifice Vishnu protects,
> " Through sacrifice the whole of creation is sustained,
> " Therefore, Bhavani, go and perform sacrifice."

When one with that supreme gift is forthcoming, the taint will disappear and religion will be purified and saved.

Harijan, 13-10-'46

SECTION TWELVE: EVIL HABITS

148

TO "UNTOUCHABLES"

You should realize that you are cleaning Hindu society. You have therefore to purify your lives. You should cultivate the habits of cleanliness, so that no one may point his finger at you. Use alkali ash or earth if you cannot afford to use soap, to keep yourselves clean. Some of you are given to drinking and gambling which you must get rid of. You will point your fingers at the Brahmanas and say 'even they are given to these vices.' But they are not looked upon as polluted; and you are. You must not ask Caste Hindus to emancipate you as a matter of favour. They must do so, if they want, in their own interests. You should, therefore, make them feel ashamed by your own purity and cleanliness.

You claim to be Hindus; you read the Bhagawat; if therefore, the Hindus oppress you then you should understand that the fault does not lie in the Hindu religion but in those who profess it. Learn spinning and weaving; if you take them up as a profession, you will keep poverty from your doors.

As regards your attitude towards the Bhangis I will repeat what I said at Godhra. I cannot understand why you should yourselves countenance the distinction between Dheds and Bhangis. There is no difference between them. Even in normal times their occupation is as honourable as that of lawyers or Government servants.

You should cease to accept leavings from plates however clean they may be represented to be. Receive grain only — good, sound grain, not rotten grain, and that too only if it is courteously offered. If you are able to do all I have asked you to do, you will secure your emancipation, not in four or five months, but in so many days.

The Hindus are not sinful by nature — they are sunk in ignorance. Untouchability must be extinct in this very year. Two of the strongest desires that keep me in flesh and bone are the emancipation of the 'untouchables' and the protection of the cow. When these two desires are fulfilled, there is Swaraj, and therein lies my own Moksha. May God give you strength to work out your salvation.

[From a speech at the Suppressed Classes Conference in Ahmedabad]

Young India, 4-5-'21

149

AT KATHIAWAD

If the orthodox Hindu refuses to get out of the vicious circle, no less does the 'untouchable' whom we are trying to bring back to our fold. "I am bound to see to it," said Gandhiji, "that you get enough clean water to drink and to bathe and wash, but will you not give up eating carrion? It is such a filthy habit, and so long as you don't give it up, I may continue to touch you but I cannot hope to succeed with the orthodox Brahmanas."

But they tried to make out a defence for using carrion. "If we are expected to dispose of dead cattle, you may not expect us to abstain from carrion." "But you will find even Brahmanas and high-class Hindus in charge of tanneries in cities. You may find me one day carrying on a tannery, but you won't find them or me ever using carrion." "That may be, but with us the habit follows the profession," they persisted. The friends at Mangrol were also faced with the same argument. They agreed that it was a filthy habit, but it was impossible for them to shake themselves free of a habit they had inherited for ages. "But is carrion delicious?" "No, not at all." "Well, I had thought it was. If it is not, and if I can assure you enough Bajri bread and milk and vegetables, would you not give up carrion?" "I am afraid, no," said the spokesman after a long pause. "We must take counsel, and then

reply to you. It is an old habit and will persist in spite of you and us. Where is the use of giving you a promise, if we are to break it on the day next you leave us ? " There was honesty in the man, but his reply showed what an uphill task lay before the reformer.

Young India, 16-4-'25

150

UNTOUCHABILITY

What though a man drinks, kills cows and eats carrion ? He is no doubt an evil-doer though no greater than the one who commits secret and more deadly sins. But he is not to be treated as an untouchable even as society does not treat the secret sinner as one. Sinners are not to be despised, but pitied and helped to rid themselves of their sinfulness. The existence of untouchability among Hindus is a denial of the doctrine of Ahimsa on which we pride ourselves. We are responsible for the evils among the 'untouchables'. What have we done to wean them from their ways ? Do we not spend a fortune to reform members of our own families ? Are the 'untouchables' not members of the great Hindu family ? Indeed, Hinduism teaches us to regard the whole of humanity as one indivisible and undivided family and holds each one of us responsible for the misdeeds of all. But if it is not possible to act up to the grand doctrine for its vastness, let us at least understand the unity of 'untouchables' with us since we regard them as Hindus.

And what is worse, eating carrion or thinking carrion ? We daily create, harbour and nourish millions of untouchable thoughts. Let us shed them, for they are the true untouchables deserving to be hated and cast out. And let us do penance for our past injustice towards the 'untouchable' brothers by lovingly embracing them. The correspondent does not question the duty of serving the 'untouchables'. How are we to serve them if their very sight offends and pollutes us ?

Young India, 13-5-'26

151

OUR SHAME AND THEIR SHAME

The long deferred Orissa visit has come to fill the bitter cup of sorrow and humiliation. It was at Bolgarh, thirtyone miles from the nearest railway station, that whilst I was sitting and talking with Deenabandhu Andrews on the 11th instant, a man with a half-bent back wearing only a dirty loin cloth came crouching in front of us. He picked up a straw and put it in his mouth and then lay flat on his face with arms outstretched and then raised himself, folded his hands, bowed, took out the straw, arranged it in his hair and was about to leave. I was writhing in agony whilst I witnessed the scene. Immediately the performance was finished, I shouted for an interpreter, asked the friend to come near and began to talk to him. He was an 'untouchable' living in a village six miles away, and being in Bolgarh for the sale of his load of faggots and having heard of me had come to see me. Asked why he should have taken the straw in his mouth, he said that was to honour me. I hung my head in shame. The price of honour seemed to me to be too great to bear. My Hindu spirit was deeply wounded. I asked him for a gift. He searched for a copper about his waist. "I do not want your copper, but I want you to give me something better," I said. "I will give it," he replied. I had ascertained from him that he drank and ate carrion because it was custom.

"The gift I want you to give me is a promise never again to take the straw in your mouth for any person on earth, it is beneath man's dignity to do so; never again to drink because it reduces man to the condition of a beast, and never again to eat carrion, for it is against Hinduism and no civilized person would ever eat carrion."

"But my people will excommunicate me, if I do not drink and eat carrion," the poor man said.

"Then suffer excommunication and if need be, leave the village."

This downtrodden humble man made the promise. If he keeps it, his threefold gift is more precious than the rupees that generous countrymen entrust to my care.

This untouchability is our greatest shame. The humiliation of it is sinking deeper.

Young India, 22-12-'27

152

EVILS A RESULT

"In the Telugu districts as well as the adjoining Tamil districts, Madigas and Malas, both of whom are at present 'untouchables', kill cows and buffaloes for purposes of sacrifice to Matamma, Mariyamma and Gangamma. There is no doubt that a certain number of caste people also take vows before these goddesses in times of emergency and calamity, but the actual sacrifice is done by the so-called outcastes. The 'untouchables' not only sacrifice animals in public but eat the beef. They also eat carrion. Caste Hindus do not, but they do freely eat pork. I would request you, therefore, to advise the 'untouchables' to give up this sacrifice and carrion-eating. The latter is responsible for their physical degeneration. Could you not also send a message for us who are working in the cause of anti-untouchability?"

This is a condensed extract from a long letter from the Secretary of the Andhra Provincial Ryots' Association. There is no doubt that this habit of carrion-eating, and especially beef-eating, has a great deal to do with the prevalent prejudice; but in no other thing is the weakness of Hinduism, or rather of Caste Hindus, betrayed so forcibly as in regarding a portion of fellow-Hindus to be untouchable and neglecting them in the cruellest manner possible. We have, therefore, only ourselves to thank that the 'untouchables' are what they are. But it is not yet too late to mend. The Harijans should realize that untouchability is dead and gone. Its evil effect will persist for a long time to come. The duration will be the measure of our joint neglect. Greater by far is the responsibility of the

Caste Hindus. If they will do their duty and work wholeheartedly, they will certainly succeed in stopping these sacrifices and the habit of carrion-eating. Nothing but the spread of enlightenment is required to rid the community of evil superstition and evil habits. But I cannot too often remind the reformers and Caste Hindus in general that they will not purify Harijans of any single one of the evil habits, if they will make the reform the condition of the removal of untouchability. Rather let us realize that the evils are a result, and not a cause, of untouchability, anyway most decidedly not at the present moment.

Harijan, 18-3-'33

153

DISPOSAL OF CARCASSES

There are several sections among Harijans, e.g. the Chakkiliyans and Madigas in South India and Chamars in Gujarat, who remove and dispose of dead cattle and eat their flesh. Disposal of dead cattle is a sacred obligation and occupation. But the eating of carrion is a most filthy habit, regarded as one of the heinous sins in Hindu scriptures, and it is essential that at this hour of self-purification our Harijan brethren should be helped to get rid of this habit. But they plead their inability to do so for various reasons. "It is a habit to which we have been accustomed for ages," they say, "and now it is a positive delicacy which we cannot forgo, anymore than you can do without your finest delicacies. You should also know that removal of dead cattle is an obligation imposed upon us and we may not shirk it without risking the wrath of the Mahajans; you know, perhaps, the carrion is part of the remuneration for the removal. We are thus tied down to carrion-eating for three reasons."

The argument deserves consideration. Written and spoken appeals will be of no avail; we must show them the way out. We should first acquaint ourselves with the

conditions obtaining in various parts of the country regarding the removal of dead cattle, and have them altered as circumstances may require ; we should supervise the actual skinning and other attendant processes and see to the proper disposal of the remains. The removal must be made conditional on a promise not to eat the carrion, and no one should be compelled to remove dead cattle.

This work demands a fair number of volunteers. They must learn the art of skinning dead cattle in a clean manner and teach it to the Harijans who are doing it today in the old fashion. The carcasses should not be dragged as at present, as it damages the hide and decreases its value. They should be lifted and removed in an expeditious and efficient manner. The hide-curers will willingly adopt the new method, but not until the so-called high caste people have mastered it.

The way in which dead cattle are disposed of today is most uneconomical and entails a loss of crores of rupees to the country. Every bit of the carcass must be made proper use of. Much of it is wasted today. The hide, the bones, the entrails and the flesh are all useful and ought to be properly utilized. The hide is being put to use of a sort. The bones are mostly wasted. They should be carefully collected and turned scientifically into manure. The entrails are utilized for gut etc., but there is room enough for improvement. The flesh should be saved from the filthy use it is turned to and must be made to yield fat, which will be valuable for manufacturing grease for factories. The remains should finally be converted into manure or buried deep. If volunteers make a point of remaining present throughout all these processes, the men will easily take to the new departure and will stop eating carrion.

There is nowhere any room for compulsion. Where the hide-curers are not ready for change, they must be left undisturbed. They are no more bound to remove the dead cattle than the caste organizations are bound to get them removed by them. It should be a matter of mutual adjustment.

But the beginning must be made by the volunteers supervising the processes, wherever, of course, the supervision is not resented. The supervision need not be delayed until the volunteers have first mastered the processes. Actual work will be a training in itself.

Municipalities and local bodies and States can immediately undertake the work of training volunteers in scientific skinning and hide-curing. This does need a little expense on buildings and experts. They should really have a training school for this purpose and invite philanthropic experts and veterinary surgeons for co-operation, suggestions and help.

Harijan, 18-3-'33

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TO HARIJAN BROTHERS

Just one word at this great meeting to Harijan brothers and sisters who may be present. You cannot be free from this self-purification. You, too, have to bring your own sacrifice to this altar and that consists in the strict observance of the laws of sanitation — internal and external, and secondly, in the giving up of carrion- and beef-eating, wherever that habit still persists. In every part of the civilized world carrion is abhorred. It is considered unfit for human consumption. And no one can call himself a Hindu and partake of beef. Sacredness of the cow and her worship are an integral part of Hinduism. Thirdly, I would ask every Harijan, man and woman present here, to give up the habit of drinking. Let no Harijan say to himself or herself or to me that many Savarna Hindus also drink. I would beseech you as a fellow-Harijan by choice to shun all vices of Savarna Hindus. In spite of all the reparation that Hindus may make to you, in spite of all the repentance they may show in the presence of God, after all, in the ultimate resort, your salvation will rest with yourselves.

[From a speech in Bangalore]

Harijan, 19-1-'34

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TO CASTE HINDUS

I do preach to the Harijans cleanliness, abstention from carrion-eating and intoxicating drinks and drugs, necessity of taking education themselves and giving it to their children, also abstention from eating the leavings from Caste Hindus' plates, etc. Only, I do not put these before Harijans as conditions precedent to the removal of untouchability. On the contrary, I suggest to Caste Hindus that the shortcomings are not inherent to Harijans but that they are due to our criminal neglect of — even deliberate suppression of — these brethren of ours. Therefore, the disappearance of these shortcomings will take place sooner for our fraternizing with Harijans even as they are, and then helping them to become better men and women. That is the least penance Caste Hindus can do for the past wrongs. We must approach Harijans as penitents or debtors, not as their patrons or creditors extending generosity to the undeserving.

Harijan, 28-9-'34

SECTION THIRTEEN: EDUCATION

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NATIONAL SCHOOLS

National schools, to be worth the name in terms of Swaraj, for the attainment of which they have been brought into existence, must be conducted with a view to advancing the national programme in so far as it is applicable to educational institutions. Thus for instance, national schools must be the most potent means of educating the 'untouchables' and abolishing the curse of untouchability from the schools. Whilst in theory the (present national) schools are open to the 'untouchables' very few, as a matter of fact, have 'untouchable' children in them. Parents who do not like their children to mix with 'untouchable' children might, if they choose, withdraw them. I have no hesitation in advising that teachers should run the risk of closing down their schools if the condition of running them requires the exclusion of 'untouchables'. It is not enough to tolerate 'untouchable' children if they stole in, but it is necessary to draw them into our schools by loving care and attention. The teachers are not to wait for parents to send their children, but it is necessary to invite such parents to send their children. A national teacher must become a Swaraj missionary within his own sphere. He should know the history of every child under his care and know the children not in his school. He should know their parents and understand why they do not send their children to his school. He will do all this work not in an intolerant spirit but lovingly. Thus and thus only will national schools be truly national in terms of the Congress resolution.

[From a speech at a Teachers' Conference]

Young India, 7-8-'24

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COMMON SCHOOLS

Common schools and wells should be opened where the existing ones are not available for Harijans either owing to the violent and successful opposition of the neighbours or some other unavoidable cause. Harijans cannot be left uncared for in matters of necessary services till public opinion has ripened. If there is a clearly awakened body of Hindus who have the same feeling towards Harijans as if they were their own kith and kin, they will not wait for public opinion to consolidate itself before taking action. They will do their best to supply pure water and good education to their own newly found kith and kin.

There is one special consideration in favour of opening what may be called preparatory schools for Harijan children. I cannot do better than quote the reason in the words of a co-worker who has gone to live in their midst and who writes :

"My school is conducted in a Harijan verandah. Some of my scholars are those whose noses are full of slime and eyes full of dirt. They spit where they squat. The condition of their bodies is in keeping with their eyes and noses. That of the clothes defies description. Some have bits of *roti* or sweets which they continually chew even whilst they are in the class. My lesson, therefore, begins with telling them how to keep clean, and behave. Whilst I am reciting the lesson, I do the cleaning myself. Lazy, talkative and quarrelsome, they provide me with a good lesson in patience. They are bad liars. Some of them are industrious and wise. I play with them and perhaps learn more than I teach. The attendance in my class varies. Sometimes I have only one youngster. The number has not yet gone beyond 15. Mind you, the school is only 10 days old and I am new to it. I begin my class in the early morning. I sleep in a Harijan Dharmashala about a furlong from the school. My work, therefore, begins as I leave my sleeping room or whatever you may call it. I have to walk with my eyes open, broom in hand, cleaning the approach to the quarters which is all made dirty every morning with human excreta. It is very wonderful how the children or their mothers snatch the broom from me and help to clean what is an apology for a road. I naturally sometimes enter their homes when they do not mind. Many of them are dark holes with inmates packed

like matches. I observe these things and much more, but for the present I keep my lips sealed. For, I have not yet qualified myself by selfless service and love in order to be able to speak to them with authority. Truly, the sun is the greatest scavenger in our country, or else some of the places, whether in Harijan quarters or in the quarters of the so-called superior castes, would be rightly uninhabitable even for those who are used to insanitary conditions. I can say at present that I rejoice in this new service and thank God that He has called me to it. But I am a novice. I know my limitations. I want to surmount them and therefore I often sing that beautiful verse we have at the Ashram: 'Thou hast not become a true Vaishnav, a true man of God, till.....'* I long to fulfil God's conditions for becoming a true Vaishnava."

This is but a sample of the condition of raw Harijan children. We want every one of these children to learn to live in a clean and decent manner. We want them all to attend the common public schools. Therefore, preparatory schools for them are an absolute essential if we mean honest business.

Harijan, 4-3-'33

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HARIJAN EDUCATION

Preliminary training should consist in teaching Harijan children manners, good speech and good conduct. A Harijan child sits anyhow; dresses anyhow; his eyes, ears, teeth, hair, nails, nose are often full of dirt; many never know what it is to have a wash. I remember what I did when in 1915, I picked up a Harijan boy at Tranquebar and took him with me to Kochrab where the Ashram was then situated. I had him shaved. He was then thoroughly washed and given a simple Dhoti, vest and a cap. In a few minutes in appearance he became indistinguishable from any child from a cultured home. His head, eyes, ears, nose were thoroughly cleaned. His nails which had become repositories of dirt were pared and cleaned. His feet which

* वैष्णव नथी थयो तुं रे।

were laden with dust were rubbed and cleaned out. Such a process has to be gone through every day, if need be, with Harijan children attending schools. Their lesson should begin for the first three months with teaching them cleanliness. They should be taught also how to eat properly, though as I write this sentence I recall what I had seen during the walking pilgrimage in Orissa. Harijan boys and grown-ups, who were fed at some of the stages, ate with much better cleanness than the others who soiled their fingers, scattered about the savings and left their places in a messy condition. Harijans had no savings and their dishes were left thoroughly clean. Their fingers whilst they were eating, were after every morsel taken licked clean. I know that all Harijan children do not eat so cleanly as the particular ones I have described.

If this preliminary training is to be given in all Harijan schools, pamphlets giving detailed instructions for teachers in their languages should be prepared and distributed, and inspectors of schools be required during their inspection to examine teachers and pupils on this head and to send full reports of the progress made in this direction.

This programme involves care in the selection of teachers and the training of the present staff. But all this is well worth the attention, if the Sangh is to discharge its trust by the thousands of Harijan children that are brought under its care.

Harijan, 18-5-'35

159

TECHNICAL TRAINING

I am aware that education among the Savarnas has often rendered them less fit for the race. But that has been so, because their education has meant contempt for labour. There is not much danger of such a mishap with the general body of Harijans for some time to come at least. And the danger can be averted altogether, if those who are in charge of the movement will take care to purge Harijan education of the evils of the current method, which ignores the technical side for the most part, if not altogether.

Harijan, 16-3-'34

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MODEL SCHOOLS FOR HARIJANS

Seth Ghanashyamdas Birla, President of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, writes:

> "We are thinking of establishing a few residential schools mainly for educating Harijan boys, though not exclusively. So far, whenever we have talked of Harijan hostels or schools, we have thereby meant cheap schools or cheap hostels conducted by ill-educated and ill-paid teachers and wardens with boys half-starved. So long as we educate Harijans or children of poor parents in these cheap institutions, the boys will never succeed in shedding the inferiority complex from which they often suffer. And what will they learn from these unqualified and ill-paid teachers? These boys never get the opportunity to mix with the other boys. The harm due to this lack of contact between the poor and the well-to-do or between Harijans and Savarnas is mutual. I therefore propose that we should have a few residential schools established in pleasing environment. They should be of a standard that would compare favourably in every respect with a well-conducted public school. We should start a few such schools first of all as a trial.
>
> They should be of the matriculation standard and affiliated to a university. They should, of course, be mostly residential. Personal attention to students should be a speciality. Education should be imparted through the medium of the mother-tongue.

English should be taught as a second language. During the period of this education, the boys should be taught useful handicrafts chosen for their educative value.

In order to make this education thorough and self-sufficient, we should take two years more than the time needed for the matriculation examination. These two years should be utilized in giving extra training to the boys besides what they learn for the matriculation course.

We propose to have three crafts, one of which will be taken up by every boy at his option. These will be:

Either (1) Carding, Spinning, Weaving, Dyeing and Bleaching; or (2) Carpentry and Smithy; or (3) Paper-making, Book-binding and Ordinary Composing.

It is intended to employ a superior staff, adequately paid, to ensure good qualifications. The underlying idea is that the boys may not feel the want of a college education. There will be no bar to such. The boys, it is hoped, will not find it difficult to earn an honest livelihood after finishing the course. It will be the duty of the Board to accommodate such boys as may like to be.

Besides the university course and craft, special attention will be given to increasing the general knowledge and hygiene. Music, games, exercises, riding, swimming, etc. should be taught. Religious or moral training should not be neglected. Equal respect for all religions should be inculcated, along with a good grounding in the principles of Hinduism and the peculiar beauties of our own culture.

Half the number of the students should be Harijans who would have free education and free boarding and lodging. The other half of the students, i.e. Savarnas, should be charged fees.

This is a very rough and brief outline of my idea of a good high school.

But there is difference amongst us about this outline. Some say: Why should we have the matriculation course? Others say: We should not undertake costly education as this will be a bad example to set. It is argued that we may employ most qualified men, but only if they come on a bare maintenance and out of a spirit of sacrifice. In other words, in their opinion, in this school there would be no room for teachers other than those prepared to lead a simple life of sacrifice. Some go to the extent of saying that we should rather have no school than start one which is not manned by a highly self-sacrificing staff.

I consider all this unpractical. I need not give my arguments. They are obvious.

Will you express your views on this question?"

I whole-heartedly support Seth Ghanashyamdas's scheme. The arguments advanced in opposition seem to be

based more on caution than on principle. I too should side with the opposition, if the scheme was to be financed out of the meagre funds of the Harijan Board. But I assume that the model schools would be financed by special donations enough to guarantee their full working. Having lived in South Africa for twenty years where every Indian is treated almost as a Pariah, I know how sensitive the mind becomes under unnatural treatment. I took some time to regain my balance though I never lost the sensitiveness. I felt that I was a strange creature in the company of the general body of Europeans. The plight of Harijans in India is much worse because of their much greater ignorance and still greater poverty. Therefore, if we are to break down the double complex, we have to bring up a fair number of Harijan lads in surroundings in no way inferior to those that are available to the well-to-do classboys. The scheme under examination does not contemplate the production of clerks who would be too big for their boots and who would be naturally discontented because no one would have them as clerks. Boys trained under the scheme would be in no way inferior in knowledge to the other matriculates. But these will be better placed because their bodies will be specially looked after and their hands will have their cunning fully developed. Such boys will have their future assured. They will have self-confidence. They will not be torn from their kith and kin; on the contrary, they will be expected to serve fellow Harijans and give them the benefit of the teaching they have received.

It may be objected that I am inconsistent in that I have written and spoken against the present system of education. The objection would be superficial. In the first place, the worst features of the system will be eliminated in that the training will be in the mother-tongue and the boys will be taught handicrafts which should enable them to earn an independent and decent living. Secondly, an objection that may be applicable to boys who can be better educated cannot be held good in the case of boys who have no choice and who smart under the knowledge

that they cannot have the education that thousands of other boys have simply because they are not Harijans. I would not insult Harijan lads by arguing with them that what the thousands of non-Harijan lads are doing is wrong, and that therefore they had better be satisfied with the shanties which Seth Ghanashyamdas has referred to in his letter.

I plump for his scheme. I wish him all success. The sooner it is launched, the better for Harijans and better for India. These schools will be potent instruments for exorcising the demon of untouchability.

Harijan, 22-2-'42

161

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR HARIJANS

I hope all those who are interested in the removal of untouchability are familiar with Mr David's scheme for the higher education of selected Harijans by Caste Hindus. In Mr David's words, " it aims at enabling a large number of untouchables to enjoy the benefits of the best higher education (including technical instruction) possible in this country." Under it, " well-to-do Caste Hindus are expected throughout India each to bear the expenses for such education of at least one Harijan student for a period of five years. Scholarships should be given to selected candidates and the expenses imply the provision of educational fees, books and living expenses on a modest scale." Mr David thinks that Rs 500/- per year per Harijan would be required for college education and half as much for high school education. He advises donors to subscribe, wherever it is possible, the whole amount covering five years in one lump sum.

" In order to build up the self-respect of Harijan scholars," says Mr David, " it should be laid down that each scholar would be expected to reimburse the amount originally advanced for his education as soon as he is in a position to do so. Thus a student is provided by means

of a loan and not a gift." And if a large number of students discharge these debts of honour, Mr David anticipates that a permanent fund will be created.

Mr David advises the formation of a Committee or Committees in provinces which will frame rules for the selection of candidates, and the disbursements of subscriptions will be subject to the recommendation of such Committee or Committees. He is emphatic that the scheme, if carried out, should "produce important and sustained results", and make possible within a comparatively short period the creation of a large number of lawyers, teachers, doctors and engineers from among Harijans. The existence of a considerable number of such persons would be of material help in raising the social status of the depressed classes, and, he adds, "it is framed on strictly non-controversial lines, thus widening to the maximum its potential field of response. It should win the support of even the staunchest Sanatanists....It is an opportunity at hand for Caste Hindus to give concrete expression of their feeling towards 'untouchables'."

Let me hope, with Mr David, that the scheme will commend itself to the "staunchest Sanatanists" and that in any case it would receive liberal support.

Harijan, 25-2-'33

162

ACADEMIC EDUCATION FOR HARIJANS

A Harijan asked if it was right to encourage Harijan boys to become B. A.s or M. A.s., when unemployment was rife among graduates, and whether it would not be better if they took to technical education. Gandhiji replied that they could hardly expect Harijans to go in for industrial education before it had successfully appealed to the Savarnas. And it was possible that, even if mere academic training was now no good for Savarnas, it had its own value for Harijans. For instance, he had long thought Dr. Ambedkar to be a Brahmana. He was equal in intelligence and ability to the tallest among us. Such distinction had its undoubted use for Harijans. Gandhiji himself fully believed in industrial education and wished the numerous Harijan students would turn their attention to it. Harijan Sevak Sanghas could not force Harijans to such education. They had to encourage the academical side by side with the industrial. It was for the Harijans to preach the gospel of industrial training.

Harijan, 6-7-'34

SECTION FOURTEEN: SCAVENGING AND OTHER OCCUPATIONS

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'UNTOUCHABLE' OCCUPATIONS

Q: Do you think that the 'untouchables' should abandon their present professions on which ground they are treated as 'untouchables'?

A: I do not advise the 'untouchables' to leave their trades and professions.

My Soul's Agony (1933), p. 42

164

SCAVENGING IN THE ASHRAM

I love scavenging. In my Ashram, an eighteen year old Brahmana lad is doing the scavenger's work in order to teach the Ashram scavenging cleanliness. The lad is no reformer. He was born and bred in orthodoxy. He is a regular reader of the Gita and faithfully performs Sandhya-vandana. His pronunciation of Sanskrit verses is more faultless than mine. When he conducts the prayer his soft sweet melodies melt one into love. But he felt that his accomplishments were incomplete until he had become also a perfect sweeper, and that if he wanted the Ashram sweeper to do his work well he must do it himself and set an example.

Young India, 4-5-'21

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WHO WILL SCAVENGE?

When untouchability has disappeared altogether, it is not feared that Bhangis will refuse to do sanitary work, if they are properly paid and well treated. Sanitary work is done well enough, if not better, in other parts of the world. But assuming that the Bhangis, on the bar sinister being removed, refuse to do our scavenging, we must be prepared to do it ourselves. The removal of untouchability implies that there is no sin or shame in cleaning for other people, even as it is no sin for a mother to clean her baby or for a paid nurse to clean her or his patient.

Young India, 22-6-'21

166

AN OVERDUE CIVIC REFORM

In its inception, untouchability was a rule of sanitation, and still is in all parts of the world outside India. That is to say, an unclean person or thing is untouchable, but immediately his or its uncleanliness is shed, he or it is no longer untouchable. Therefore, a person who is to attend to scavenging, whether it is a paid Bhangi or an unpaid mother, they are unclean until they have washed themselves clean of their unclean work. If, instead of being regarded as untouchable for ever, the Bhangi was treated as a brother and was given an opportunity and even made to become clean after performing an unclean service for society, he should be as acceptable as any other member of that society. Corporations can, therefore, lead the way in this matter, but they will not unless the citizens insist.

Harijan, 11-2-'33

167

EVEN UNTO THESE LAST

For the heading of this article I have dared to steal from Ruskin a classical phrase stolen by him in his turn from the Bible. I have added 'even' to the original and changed 'this' into 'these' to bring out the whole sense of what I want to say. Among the Harijans the poor scavenger or the Bhangi seems to stand last in the list, though he is perhaps the most important and indispensable member of society, as indispensable to it as a mother is to her children in one respect. The Bhangi attends to the sanitation of society as a mother to that of her children. If the Caste men had to do the scavenging for themselves, some of the methods that the Bhangi has to submit to for doing his work would have been swept away long ago. I copy the following from a letter of the Anti-Untouchability Board of Mathura to its Municipal Board :

> "We have no idea of the depths of degradation and misery to which we as a class have reduced our brethren of the depressed classes.
>
> "He must be a heartless fellow who has remained unmoved at the pathetic sight of a slender, aged and emaciated woman carrying, and being crushed under, the weight of a basket full of night-soil over her head every morning from the city lanes to the trenching ground or the flushing pit. The practice, though old, is inhuman, cruel and a relic of barbaric days. It is unhygienic. Very often it is noticed that out of the uncovered or partly covered basket the dirt is carried up the air by a strong breeze and on to the passers-by, or shops displaying sweets or other edibles. The human head, the seat of reason and intelligence, the divine symbol, was never intended to be used for the dirty load. The human carrier loses all sense of self-respect and dignity; and yet for whom is this service meant ? Ye ! Chosen Representatives of the City, ponder over the matter and judge your responsibility for this inhumanity. The solution is simple. Just purchase hand-driven trolleys and let these speechless servants of yours use the trolley as a carrier rather than the head. Another matter for your consideration. Every privy should be provided with metal or earthen basins, so that the process of removing night-soil may be rendered less uncleanly."

Let not the reader laugh at the somewhat highflown language of the writer. What he has said is God's truth. The Bhangis have hitherto done their work uncomplainingly, and therefore the Caste men have not cared to know how these have served society for centuries. If we had not regarded these servants of society as 'untouchables', we would not have shut our eyes upon them or their work. Having chosen to do so and having confined them to infernos, we ourselves daily descend to these infernos called privies and do not care to look at the dirt about us or to notice the stink that pervades these places. What is true of the Bhangis and the Municipality of Mathura is true more or less of all the Bhangis and all the Municipalities of India. The reform suggested by the Anti-Untouchability Board of Mathura is most desirable and can be undertaken without much cost by every Municipality.

I read the other day a notice in the *Leader* of Allahabad of the scavenging work, inaugurated by a zamindar, in the Allahabad streets, and hardly had the work gone on for two days, when the enthusiastic young men who had undertaken this glorious service thought of replacing the baskets by a better arrangement. Let me again quote, this time from the *Leader* dated February 27 :

> "An effort is being made by the Anti-Untouchability workers to replace the baskets at present in use by the sweepers for the disposal of rubbish from private latrines with light iron hand-carts fitted with detachable buckets. According to the proposed scheme, the cost of such carts would be borne by the employers of the sweepers. It is understood the Manager of the Allahabad Law Journal Co. has generously undertaken to have a model baby filth removal cart constructed at his own expense for propaganda work. According to the scheme, every private latrine would have to be provided with two receptacles. An anonymous donation has been received from a high caste Brahmana woman for the construction of a public bathroom at or near Kalimanika Asthan. This work would be undertaken as soon as proper drainage and water supply arrangements are made by the Municipal authorities in the locality in question."

I hope that the enthusiasm has not died down during the weeks that have intervened between the date of the

report and now. Some earnest workers have simply to persist and the much-needed reform can be inaugurated in every town and city.

There are thus three reforms which can be, with a little forethought and very little extra cost, inaugurated throughout India, resulting in comfort and cleanliness for Harijans and promotion of the health of society in general. All that is required is that we should behave 'even unto these last' members of society as we would unto ourselves.

Harijan, 18-3-'33

168

THE IDEAL BHANGI

The ideal Bhangi of my conception would be a Brahmana *par excellence*, possibly even excel him. It is possible to envisage the existence of a Bhangi without a Brahmana. But without the former the latter could not be. It is the Bhangi who enables society to live. A Bhangi does for society what a mother does for her baby. A mother washes her baby of the dirt and insures his health. Even so the Bhangi protects and safeguards the health of the entire community by maintaining sanitation for it. The Brahmana's duty is to look after the sanitation of the soul, the Bhangi's that of the body of society. But there is a difference in practice; the Brahmana generally does not live up to his duty, the Bhangi does willy nilly no doubt. Society is sustained by several services. The Bhangi constitutes the foundation of all services.

And yet our woebegone Indian society has branded the Bhangi as a social Pariah, set him down at the bottom of the scale, held him fit only to receive kicks and abuse, a creature who must subsist on the leavings of the Caste people and dwell on the dung-heap. He is without a friend, his very name has become a term of reproach. This is shocking. It is perhaps useless to seek the why and wherefore of it. I certainly am unaware of the origin of the inhuman conduct, but I know this much that by looking

down upon the Bhangi we — Hindus, Musalmans, Christians and all — have deserved the contempt of the whole world. Our villages have today become seats of dirt and insanitation, and the villagers come to an early and untimely death. If only we had given due recognition to the status of the Bhangi as equal to that of a Brahmana as in fact and justice he deserves, our villages today no less than their inhabitants would have looked a picture of cleanliness and order. We would have to a large extent been free from the ravages of a host of diseases which directly spring from our uncleanliness and lack of sanitary habits.

I therefore make bold to state without any manner of hesitation or doubt that not till the invidious distinction between the Brahmana and the Bhangi is removed, will our society enjoy health, prosperity and peace and be happy.

What qualities should such an honoured servant of society exemplify in his person? In my opinion an ideal Bhangi should have a thorough knowledge of the principles of sanitation. He should know how a right kind of latrine is constructed, and the correct way of cleaning it. He should know how to overcome and destroy the odour of excreta and the various disinfectants to render them innocuous. He should likewise know the process of converting night-soil and urine into manure.

But that is not all. My ideal Bhangi would know the quality of night-soil and urine. He would keep a close watch on these and give a timely warning to the individual concerned. Thus he will give a timely notice of the results of his examination of the excreta. That presupposes a scientific knowledge of the requirements of his profession. He would likewise be an authority on the subject of disposal of night-soil in small villages as well as big cities, and his advice and guidance in the matter would be sought for and freely given to society. It goes without saying that he would have the usual learning necessary for reaching the standard here laid down for his profession. Such an ideal Bhangi, while deriving his livelihood from his occupation,

would approach it only as a sacred duty. In other words he would not dream of amassing wealth out of it. He would consider himself responsible for the proper removal and disposal of all the dirt and night-soil within the area which he serves, and regard the maintenance of healthy and sanitary condition within the same as the *summum bonum* of his existence.

How may we have this ideal Bhangi? To clothe the Bhangi with the dignity and respect due to him is the especial task and privilege of the educated class. Some members of the class would first themselves master the science of sanitation to educate the Bhangis round them in the same. They would carefully study their present condition and the causes underlying it and set themselves to the task of eradicating the same by dint of inexhaustible perseverance and patience that never looks back and knows no defeat. They would teach them the laws of cleanliness. Our Bhangis do not today possess even good brooms or other suitable means for the removal of night-soil. The latrines themselves are wretched. The site round the Bhangis' quarters is no better than a cesspool of dirt. All this can only go if some of the educated class give themselves up to the task of redeeming the Bhangi from his present plight and thus redeeming society from its terrible insanitation. Surely this is work enough to satisfy the highest ambition of one who has the spirit of service in him.

Harijan, 28-11-'36

169

SWEEPERS' STRIKE

There are certain matters in which strikes would be wrong. Sweepers' grievances come in this category. I do not want to go into others here. My opinion against sweepers' strikes dates back to about 1897 when I was in Durban. A general strike was mooted there and the question arose as to whether scavengers should join in it. My vote was registered against the proposal. Just as man cannot live without air, so too he cannot exist for long if his home and surroundings are not clean. One or other epidemic is bound to break out especially when modern drainage is put out of action.

Therefore I was perturbed when I read about the sweepers' strike in Bombay. Fortunately it has come to an end. I understand, however, that the sweepers, both men and women, refused to submit their case to arbitration.

In spite of my close attachment to sweepers, better because of it, I must denounce the coercive methods they are said to have employed. They will thereby be losers in the long run. City folk will not always be cowed down. If they were, it would mean the collapse of municipal administration. Coercion cannot but result in the end in chaos. An impartial tribunal for settling disputes should always be accepted. Refusal is a sign of weakness. A Bhangi may not give up his work even for a day. And there are many other ways open to him of securing justice.

Townspeople should, on the other hand, forget that there is such a thing as untouchability and learn the art of cleaning their own and the city's drains, so that if a similar occasion arises they are not nonplussed and can render the necessary temporary service. They may not be coerced. I go so far as to say that the military who know this work should be used for such emergency. If Swaraj is round the

bend, we can now look upon the military as ours and need have no hesitation in taking all the constructive work we can from them. Up till now they have only been employed in indiscriminate firing on us. Today they must plough the land, dig wells, clean latrines and do every other constructive work that they can, and thus turn the people's hatred of them into love.

Now that the *hartal* is at an end, it is the duty of everyone to stretch out the hand of fellowship to the Bhangis, educate them, see that they are properly housed, permit them, like anyone else, to live wherever they choose, look in the matter of an equitable wage for them and see that justice is meted out to them without their having to demand it. If this is done throughout India we shall definitely prove ourselves worthy of Swaraj and be able also to maintain it.

Harijan, 21-4-'46

170

A HARIJAN'S LETTER

A Harijan friend complains bitterly about my article on sweepers' strike.

His first complaint is that I have given up the sweet name 'Harijan' and used 'Bhangi' instead. The criticism shows the sensitive nature of the correspondent. It was a Gujarati 'untouchable', in the first instance, who suggested the name 'Harijan' to me and I willingly adopted it. This does not, however, mean that a current word for any sub-caste may never be used. I count myself a Harijan and it pleases me to call myself a Bhangi among them, because that is the lowest caste of Harijans. When I stayed recently in the sweepers' quarters in Delhi, the Harijans there too complained against the use of the word 'Bhangi'. They suggested 'Mehtar'. I tried to make them understand that it mattered little as to which of the current words was used for the same occupation. In spite of being

considered the lowest occupation, it was in fact the highest inasmuch as it protected health, and they should be indifferent to the name. Whatever the origin of the word may be, 'Bhangi' is, in my opinion, another name for Shivji. Whether you call a sweeper a Mehtar or a Bhangi, like Shivji he brings health to man. The one brings it by keeping the home clean, the other cleanses the mind of man.

The second criticism is more serious. Prejudices are responsible for misunderstandings. If we take by force even that to which we are entitled, the action is likely to lead to a quarrel. We may not even be able to digest what we get by force. The strikers got what they did by coercion. At least, that is my belief. If my occupation is to keep latrines clean and I refused to do the work, can it be termed anything other than coercion ? Of course, I am not bound to take up the job of cleaning latrines and I may be said to have every right to lay down my conditions of service. But according to my way of thinking, the laying down of conditions is not an absolute right. Even if such an absolute right would be permitted, it might not be proper to use it under certain circumstances. But I do not want to enter into the justification of this reasoning. I tried to show in my article the duties of Bhangis as well as of citizens. I have often said that every kind of injustice is meted out to Bhangis. I have no doubt that citizens do not fulfil their obligations to them. Thus it is their duty to see that Harijan dwellings are built properly, the means employed for cleaning are decent, that they have a special working uniform given to them, that they and their children have facilities for education etc. These and other problems should be solved without loss of time. The Bhangis may not go on strike for lack of these amenities but it is up to all citizens to raise their voice on behalf of them.

Yet another criticism is directed against my suggestion of the use of the military to do sweepers' work. I do not see any wrong in what I said. I have re-read my article and am not willing to withdraw one single word of it. I

do not regret having written as I did. I advise Harijan friends to read it in the proper spirit. If they do so, they will see that my feelings on their behalf have undergone no change.

Harijan, 12-5-'46

171

BHANGI STRIKES

A writer enquires what the poor sweeper is to do when everything else fails. He indignantly asks :

> " Is the Bhangi to continue his service on starvation wages, living in dirt and squalor ? "

The question is appropriate. I claim that in such cases the proper remedy is not a strike but a notice to the public in general and the employing corporation in particular that the Bhangis must give up the sweeping service which consigns those reserved for that service to a life of starvation and all it means. There is a wide distinction between a strike and an entire discontinuation (not suspension) of service. A strike is a temporary measure in expectation of relief. Discontinuance is giving up of a particular job because there is no expectation of relief. Proper discontinuance presupposes fair notice on the one hand, and prospect of better wages and freedom from squalor and dirt on the other. This will wake up society from its disgraceful slumber resulting in a proper scavenging of the overgrowth that has smothered public conscience. At a stroke the Bhangis will raise scavenging to a fine art and give it the status it should have had long ago.

Harijan, 23-6-'46

172

VALMIKIS OF INDIA

Readers must know that Valmiki is another word for Bhangi. Their living quarters in Simla are deplorable. No one bothers about them. I am unable to get as far and see things for myself, but I requested Badshah Khan who is staying with me to go there. He gives me a piteous account of their hovels. Some of the Valmikis have been to see me and have placed other woeful complaints before me. I feel that if in the first instance their living quarters were rebuilt many of their other complaints too would be put right. It is the bounden duty of the public and the Municipality of Simla to remove this evil as soon as they can from their midst. They can be no cleaner than the least clean among them.

Harijan, 19-5-'46

173

IMPROVING CONDITIONS OF SCAVENGERS' WORK

[In reply to a correspondent's question on this subject Gandhiji wrote :]

I would advocate bye-laws requiring authorized receptacles, brooms, etc. which would avoid physical handling of dirt, and would also prescribe a simple working costume. Inspectors or overseers will be trained for this humane and sanitary work instead of being expected to exact work anyhow. The result of the present system is maximum of insanitation and minimum of work plus bribery, corruption and bad manners.

Harijan, 6-10-'46

174

UNTOUCHABILITY AND THE FLUSH SYSTEM

Q: Do you consider that the adoption of the flush system is one way of eradicating untouchability? If so, you would not presumably oppose its introduction on the basis of your dislike of machinery.

A: Where there is ample supply of water and modern sanitation can be introduced without any hardship on the poor, I have no objection to it. In fact, it should be welcomed as a means of improving the health of the city concerned. At the moment, it can only be introduced in towns. My opposition to machinery is much misunderstood. I am not opposed to machinery as such. I am opposed to machinery which displaces labour and leaves it idle. Whether the flush system will remove the curse of untouchability, is open to grave doubt. This latter has to go from our hearts. It will not disappear through such means as has been suggested. Not until we all become Bhangis and realize the dignity of the labour of scavenging and latrine-cleaning, will untouchability really be exorcised.

Harijan, 15-9-'46

175

SPINNING AND WEAVING FOR HARIJANS

During my peregrinations I have observed that spinning and weaving are among the industries that are supporting thousands of Harijans and, if properly organized, can support many more. Indeed, in some places, there are to be found weavers who are classed as untouchables on account of their occupation. They are mostly weavers of coarsest Khadi without any pattern. This class was fast dying out when Khadi came to the rescue and there was created a demand for their coarse manufacture. It was then discovered that there were numerous Harijan families that even subsisted on spinning. Thus Khadi is doubly the poor man's staff of life. It helps the poorest, including the Harijans, who are the most helpless among the poorest. They are so because many occupations which are available to the others are not available to the Harijans.

Harijan, 27-4-'34

176

HARIJANS AS COOKS

Q: Don't you think that, if the Congress started a plan for training Harijans as expert cooks for Hindu homes and made it a rule to man every Ashram or a mess meant for Congress workers with Harijan cooks thus trained, it would prove a short cut to the removal of untouchability?

A: Our ambition should be to enable Harijans to rise to the highest rank. But while that must be the ideal, it will be a good thing to train some Harijans to become accomplished cooks. I have observed that the more we draw them into the domestic circle, the quicker is the pace of the reform. Harijans who become absorbed in our homes lose all sense of inferiority and become a living link between other Harijans and Savarna Hindus.

Harijan, 25-5-'40

177

HARIJAN COOKS

A correspondent suggests that at the next session of the Congress all the cooks should be Harijans and to that end a corps of Harijan cooks should be trained in the observance of cleanliness and the art of cooking scientifically and as behoves a poor country like ours. He would have this privilege and duty given to the Congressmen in the province in which the Congress session is to be held. After the session these cooks should be taken over by those Congressmen who can afford it and keep cooks. Any suggestion like this which shows in practice that untouchability is a thing of the past is to be welcomed. I would only add that Congressmen who endorse it need not wait for the session. They should from now take up Harijans not merely as their cooks but have them in all other capacities. What is more, let those who can afford it take Harijans in their families as their own children and give them proper training. All this can only happen if men and women are sincere in their professions, and if the truth has gone home that under the garb of religion Hinduism is said to have consigned to untouchability their own kith and kin for no fault of theirs.

Harijan, 19-5-'46

SECTION FIFTEEN : PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION

178

SEPARATE ELECTORATES FOR 'UNTOUCHABLES'

I am certain that the question of separate electorates for the 'untouchables' is a modern manufacture of a Satanic Government. The only thing needed is to put them on the voters' list, and provide for fundamental rights for them in the Constitution. In case they are unjustly treated and their representative is deliberately excluded they would have the right to special Election Tribunal which would give them complete protection. It should be open to these Tribunals to order the unseating of an elected candidate and election of the excluded man.

Separate electorates to the 'untouchables' will ensure them bondage in perpetuity. The Musalmans will never cease to be Musalmans by having separate electorates. Do you want the 'untouchables' to remain untouchables for ever? Well, the separate electorates would perpetuate the stigma. What is needed is destruction of untouchability and when you have done it, the bar sinister which has been imposed by an insolent 'superior' class upon an 'inferior' class will be destroyed. When you have destroyed the bar sinister, to whom will you give the separate electorates? Look at the history of Europe. Have you got separate electorates for the working classes or women? With adult franchise, you give the 'untouchables' complete security. Even the orthodox Hindus would have to approach them for votes.

[From a speech at the Indian Students' Majlis in London]
Young India, 12-11-'31

BEFORE THE MINORITIES COMMITTEE OF THE ROUND TABLE CONFERENCE

I can understand the claims advanced by other Minorities, but the claims advanced on behalf of the 'untouchables', is to me the 'unkindest cut of all'. It means the perpetual bar sinister. I would not sell the vital interests of the 'untouchables' even for the sake of winning the freedom of India. I claim myself, in my own person, to represent the vast mass of the 'untouchables'. Here I speak not merely on behalf of the Congress, but I speak on my own behalf, and I claim that I would get, if there was a referendum of the 'untouchables', their vote, and that I would top the poll. And I would work from one end of India to the other to tell the 'untouchables' that separate electorates and separate reservation is not the way to remove this bar sinister, which is the shame, not of them, but of orthodox Hinduism. Let this Committee and let the whole world know that today there is a body of Hindu reformers who are pledged to remove this blot of untouchability. We do not want on our register and on our census 'untouchables' classified as a separate class. Sikhs may remain as such in perpetuity, so may Moslems, so may Europeans. Will 'untouchables' remain untouchables in perpetuity ? I would far rather that Hinduism died than that untouchability lived.

I do not mind the 'untouchables' being converted to Islam or Christianity. I should tolerate that, but I cannot possibly tolerate what is in store for Hinduism if there are two divisions set forth in the villages. Those who speak of political rights of 'untouchables' do not know India and do not know how Indian society is today constructed. Therefore, I want to say with all the emphasis that I can command that if I was the only person to resist this thing I will resist it with my life.

Young India, 26-11-'31

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HARIJANS AND PARTY-POLITICS

You must not identify yourselves with any party. My views about the existing system of Government have not changed, but with the peculiar disabilities that you have suffered for ages I would not expect you to identify yourselves even with the most forward party in India. You will accept whatever is given you by Government, but you will not sacrifice your self-respect. You will similarly endorse whatever is good in the Congress programme, e.g. prohibition, abolition of the salt tax, and say to the world that you would not allow the Harijans to be in any way isolated from the poor of India whose interests are identical with yours. Whilst you will join no party you will under no circumstances whatsoever sell the country. If you can do this, Harijans will be the greatest factor in India. When these Harijans awake, they will become an irremovable force.

[Report of a conversation]
Harijan, 28-3-'36

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FIVE QUESTIONS BY A HARIJAN M. L. A.

Q. 1. What will be the position of the Harijans in the future Constitution to be framed ?

2. Will you advise the Government and the Congress to agree to fix the seats from a Panchayat Board upwards to the State Council on population basis ?

3. Will you advise the Congress and the leaders of the various majority parties in the legislatures in the provinces to nominate the cabinet members from among the Scheduled caste legislators who enjoy the confidence of the majority of Scheduled caste members ?

4. In view of the backwardness of the Harijans will you advise the Government to make a provision in the Act that executive posts in the Local Boards and Municipal Councils be held

on communal rotation so as to enable the Harijans to become presidents and chairmen ?

5. Why do you not fix some percentage of seats for Harijans from District Congress Committee upwards to the Working Committee of the Congress ?

A. 1. The Constitution which I could influence would contain a provision making the observance of untouchability in any shape or form an offence. The so-called untouchables would have seats reserved for them in all elected bodies according to their population within the electoral area concerned.

2. You will see that the answer is covered by the foregoing.

3. I cannot. The principle is dangerous. Protection of its neglected classes should not be carried to an extent which will harm them and harm the country. A cabinet minister should be a topmost man commanding universal confidence. A person after he has secured a seat in an elected body should depend upon his intrinsic merit and popularity to secure coveted positions.

4. In the first place I am not interested in the present Act which is as good as dead. But I am opposed to your proposal on the ground already mentioned.

5. I am opposed for the reasons mentioned. But I should like to compel large elective Congress organizations to ensure the election of Harijan members in proportion to their numbers on the Congress register. If Harijans are not interested enough in the Congress to become 4 anna members, they may not expect to find their names in the elective bodies. But I would strongly advise Congress workers to see that they approach Harijans and induce them to become members of the Congress.

Harijan, 2-8-'42

LEFT-HANDED COMPLIMENT

"I am writing this letter with a hope of getting proper and immediate response from you. Along with the whole of India I am well aware of your sweet will and affinity towards the Mehtar community. Your *Harijan* has obliged us to a great extent by enabling us to see through your heart. Especially the recent *Harijans* have emphatically revealed your thoughts about the Mehtar community.

"I now wish to reveal my interrogatory heart in order to be wellnigh to your feelings towards us and to be definite about our position in the muddled and complicated Indian political field.

"1. By the time you will receive this letter it will be the last date of filling in nomination forms for the candidateships for the Constituent Assembly, which has, it is learnt, to be completed by the end of this month. Congress is proposing particular M.L.A.s and non-M.L.A.s for the same. It is believed that Scheduled Castes are also to be represented (adequately ?). But is there any proposal from you or from Congress to elect adequate or at least some members from the Mehtar community who, I am sure, will discharge their duty of citizenship and pick up their legitimate share in the future constitution of Free India ?

"2. Generous as you are towards us, may I assure myself and my community that Mehtar seats in the Constituent Assembly will not escape your notice ?

"3. Who will be the components of the Advisory Board ? Caste Hindus or Minorities including (?) the Scheduled Castes ?

"4. Will the advice or proposals of the Advisory Board be binding to the Constituent Assembly ? I think they will not. If so, what sense is there in appointing such a Board, which will be nonentity if the Constituent Assembly were not to pay heed to its advice. Is it not merely for the appeasement of the weak minorities ?

"You might say you have been and will do everything for us, but I wish to say 'let us be with you when everything for us is to be done. Let us be represented democratically.'

"I strongly hope that my questions will be fully and satisfactorily answered by you with an obligation of immediate reply to me. I further humbly request you to be good enough to publish your answers in your weekly *Harijan*.

"Hope to be excused for troubles."

I have reproduced the foregoing in order to show what havoc dangerous knowledge of English has produced in our

society. This is a specimen not of English English nor yet of Indian English. It is bookish English which the writer probably half understands. I suggest to him that if he had written to me in the national language Hindustani or in his provincial language, it would not have evoked an unfavourable response from me.

The writer has paid me a left-handed compliment and that perhaps in order to teach me how to express my love for the Bhangi, known as Mehtar. The writer is a discontented graduate setting no example or a bad example to Bhangis. He has isolated himself from them, though he professes to represent them.

He will certainly become my teacher if he will be a graduate in the art of being a good Bhangi. I very much fear that he does no scavenging himself, he does not know what scientific scavenging is. If he became an expert in the art his services would be wanted by all the cities of India. When Bhangis really rise from the slumber of ages, they will successfully sweep the Augean stables everywhere and India will be a pattern of cleanliness, and there will be in India no plague and other diseases which are the descendants of filth and dirt.

In the place where I am living in Bombay, my room and the adjoining lavatory are fairly clean but I am in the midst of suffocating dirt. I have had no time to examine the tenements in front of me. They are as crowded and as dirty as the ones in the quarters where I was living in New Delhi. Had my graduate fellow Bhangi been an expert in the art, I would without doubt have requisitioned his services as my guide and helper.

As it is, not only have I no use for him, I have to risk his displeasure by telling him that he should not think of the Constituent Assembly or other assemblies. Let those go to them who are wanted there. Instead of getting rid of the wretched caste mentality, he argues that any Harijan is not good enough for the purpose but preference should be given to the Mehtar caste. I suggest to him that it is a harmful method, doing no good to anybody.

Anyway, he has expected the impossible from me. I am not made for these big institutions. I have never interested myself in the periodical assembly elections. I have not attended Working Committee meetings where they make these selections. What I know of the present selections is from the newspapers. I have become a Bhangi because I think that that is the vocation of every Hindu, that the hoary institution of untouchability as we know it today in its ugly shape will die a decent death only when the Hindus will be casteless by becoming Bhangis from the bottom of their hearts. That cannot be done by aspiring after the membership my correspondent has in view.

Harijan, 14-7-'46

183

SCHEDULED CASTES

Q: What is going to be the place of the untouchables in your Swaraj? The Congress has talked a lot about protecting the minorities. Why has the Congress failed to produce its blue-print of the plan for protecting the minorities? Is this silence not calculated to create want of confidence in the bona fides of the Congress?

A: The place of 'untouchables' in the Swaraj of my conception will be the same in every respect as that of the so-called Caste Hindus. Such is also the position of the Congress. It has talked less and done more for minorities than any other cosmopolitan body known to me. There is no blue-print necessary when work speaks.

Q: Does the Congress regard the untouchables as a minority?

A: The Congress should not regard the 'untouchables' as a minority for the simple reason that they are not a minority in the sense in which Parsis, Jews, Christians and others can call themselves minorities. Harijans are a minority, if Brahmanas, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas are minorities, and Shudras are a majority. These are not minorities and majorities in the sense we are used to. We

have fortunately not come to that pass. When we do, it will be goodbye to any kind of Swaraj. The English may go today, they will some day, but if we become savages cutting one another's throats we will have the freedom that savages have.

Harijan, 28-7-'46

184

THE RIGHTS OF HARIJANS

I have received letters from Harijan friends and some have been to see me too. Now that power has come into the nation's hands, they feel that there should be more than one Harijan Minister. Their population ratio demands at least three. Moreover, they claim representation in every department on this basis. It would be wrong, they say, to hold that there are not enough able persons among them. They maintain that the rule of capability is by no means applied to non-Harijans. They can cite instances of nepotism.

I am not ready to admit the correctness of all they say. My mind works quite differently. Man is master as far as performance of his duty is concerned and I hold that his rights really spring from duties properly performed. Such rights alone are befitting as also lasting. If every non-Harijan who had ability was able to exercise his rights, society would be disrupted. Performance of duty was open to every one. The field of service is immense. Few can become masters and he fails who seeks to become master. I know, however, that people do not act as I have suggested. Hence there is a general scramble for power. And many are turned away disappointed. Holding the views I do, I have tried to act on them for the last fifty years. I am uninterested in the unbecoming struggle for power. My sole advice to Harijans is that they should think only in terms of their duties and rights will follow as surely as day follows night.

Harijan, 6-10-'46

SECTION SIXTEEN: ADVICE TO WORKERS

185

TRUTH THE ONLY WAY

If this movement is essentially religious and has for its object the purification and protection of Hinduism, it can be carried on only by truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Truth is the very foundation of religion. If Truth is God, there can be no room for untruth in religion. Let every Harijan Sevak inscribe this fundamental principle on the tablet of his heart. Let the workers know that exaggeration is also a species of untruth. There is a great temptation to swell the list of temples and wells opened, for fear of my fast being precipitated. It is a disheartening thought for me and it betrays a poor opinion of the great movement. My fast was not designed to coerce people in any shape or form. It was designed merely to make Hindus think and to spur them to action. Truth is made of sterner stuff, and it must be held superior to any life or lives, be they ever so precious. It must live even if a million lives had to be sacrificed. In a big, religious movement like the drive against untouchability, which many believe to be an integral part of Hindu religion, nothing but unadulterated truth and unconquerable faith in the cause will avail. The reformers hold untouchability to be itself the biggest blot on Hinduism, a great lie. If it is, it can be defeated only by truth and gentleness.

Harijan, 18-3-'33

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HARIJAN WORKERS

What will you do to remove untouchability? If you will say that you have done your duty by declaring that untouchability is a blot on Hinduism it will be a mockery. It will not be enough even if you in a flush of enthusiasm go to a Harijan and touch him and embrace him, and then forget all about him. It will not do even if you go to the Harijan quarters every day and make it a point to touch a number of Harijans as a token of your conviction.

What is required of you is that you should regulate your day to day conduct in such a manner that you make it absolutely evident to the Harijans whom you come across that a better day has dawned for them all.

[From a speech at the Kengeri Conference]

Harijan, 20-6-'36

187

ONE THING NEEDFUL

The one thing needful for effective Harijan service, and for that matter all service of the poor, the forlorn, the helpless, is purity of personal character in the servant. Without it possession of even the highest intellectual ability and administrative capacity is of no account. It may even prove a hindrance, whereas possession of a pure character combined with love of such service will assuredly develop or provide the requisite intellectual and administrative capacity.

There is in modern public life a tendency to ignore altogether the character of a public worker so long as he works efficiently as a unit in an administrative machinery. It is said that everybody's character is his own private concern. Though I have known this view to have been often-taken I have never been able to appreciate, much less

to adopt, it. I have known the serious consequences overtaking organizations that have counted private character as a matter of no consequence. Nevertheless the reader will have observed that for my immediate purpose I have restricted the application of my proposition only to organizations like the Harijan Sevak Sangh which make themselves trustees for the welfare of dumb millions. I have no manner of doubt that possession of a spotless character is the indispensable requisite of such service. Workers in the Harijan cause or for Khadi or for village industries must come in closest touch with utterly unsophisticated, innocent, ignorant men and women who might be likened to children in intelligence. If they have not character, they must fail in the end and for ever damn the cause they espouse in the surroundings in which they are known. I write from experience of such cases. Happily they are rare enough for the numbers engaged in such services, but frequent enough to call for public warning and caution on the part of organizations and workers who are engaged in such services. These last cannot be too watchful or too exacting of themselves.

Harijan, 7-11-'36

188

HARIJAN SEVAK'S QUALIFICATIONS

Q: What are the qualifications that a Harijan Sevak should have in order to make his work felt?

A: Every Sevak must be fired with a passion to purify Hinduism and must be ready to lay down his life in the attempt. Such a Sevak will be ready to sacrifice his all — family connections, social advantages, and life itself — in order to wipe out the blot on Hinduism. The work should be as one of life's essential functions e.g. offering one's prayers, ablutions, etc. not carrying emolument or reward. If the worker is fired with this passion, the way will be clear before him. Thus a worker would rather

starve than allow the Harijans to be starved, would hesitate to use amenities which are denied to the Harijans and feel increasing identification with them every day. All this work is to be done without regard to political results, and only in order to keep Hinduism pure and alive.

Harijan, 1-2-'42

189

PILGRIMAGE ON FOOT

Daily the idea is growing on me that I should finish the balance of the Harijan tour by walking as far as it may be possible. The movement is essentially religious in conception and execution. If the motive is religious, so is the end sought. Nor need anyone run away with the idea that the tour has been undertaken for the sole purpose of collecting funds. I am sure that both the men, women and money that may be necessary for the cause will be forthcoming even though I may be walking. It is likely that, if any message comes from the heart, it will travel faster on foot than by rail or motor.

Harijan 11-5-'34

The day on which I am writing this is the sixth day of the walking pilgrimage. By train and motor I would have covered probably seven-hundred and fifty miles and would have nominally seen 1,50,000 people at least. On foot I have covered not more than 40 miles, the sixth day being my silence day, and come in touch with not less than 20,000 men and women.

My innermost feeling is that the work done is in inverse ratio to that between the artificial locomotion and the natural. The contact during the past five days has been more real between the villagers and myself.

I expect the all-India workers to arrange simultaneous walking tours in their own provinces for the purpose of delivering the message and even collecting coppers and silver pieces from the people by way of purses to be sent to me, as they would have given if I had gone to them. There

should be more intimate touch established between the workers and the Harijans and friendliest approach to the Sanatanists. There should be a more real appreciation of the difficulties and disabilities of the Harijans in the villages visited. There should be more temples opened, more Harijan children brought to public schools. Let the workers and the villagers believe that, inasmuch as I am walking to the Utkal villages, I am walking to theirs also. If mine is a spiritual act, it should have that value, the people should feel impelled to intensify their effort on behalf of the cause. This pilgrimage should result in the discovery of more workers and the increasing dedication of the existing ones.

Harijan, 18-5-'34

190

ADVICE TO HARIJAN WORKERS

It is the obvious duty of Harijan workers to carry on internal reform to the extent it is possible even in the face of the existing state of things.

Harijan workers should, therefore, devote all their energy to :

(i) Promotion of cleanliness and hygiene among the Harijans.

(ii) Improved methods of carrying on what are known as unclean occupations, e.g., scavenging and tanning.

(iii) Giving up of carrion and beef if not meat altogether.

(iv) Giving up of intoxicating liquors.

(v) Inducing parents to send their children to day-schools wherever they are available, and parents themselves to attend night-schools wherever such are opened.

(vi) Abolition of untouchability among themselves.

My Soul's Agony (1933), 14-11-'32; pp. 31 & 32.

PROGRAMME OF WORK

As regards the general complaint of Municipal neglect, Gandhiji said they must rouse the members from their lethargy by directly approaching them as well as by educating the voters, who could then be expected to keep the members straight.

But irrespective of what the Municipalities might do or fail to do, the Sangha must try to secure decent living conditions for Harijans. And this could be done with ease and without any heavy expenditure. First, they must see to the proper drainage and cleaning of the Harijan quarters and the making of roads. Slight repairs should be carried out in the houses so as to allow a free passage to light and air. If they placed before Municipalities a modest programme of improving the sanitation of Harijan quarters, they would make a small grant of money to the Sangha and make them their agents in carrying it out, for Municipalities might not have at hand the workers required, or if the workers were there, they might not have a keen interest in work of this nature.

Secondly, they must obtain for Harijans a good supply of water. Harijans in villages were worse off in this respect than their fellows in cities. They had yet to develop strength enough to assert and maintain their right to draw water from public wells by seeking the protection of courts or otherwise. Meanwhile the Sangha must construct for them good wells from which even the Savarnas would be tempted to take water for themselves, and during the period that these wells were under construction, reformers must draw water for the Harijans and pour it into their pots.

Thirdly, the Sangha should establish good preparatory schools for Harijan children, where the teachers would not make a fetish of the three R's, but try to teach their pupils to keep their person and clothes clean, so as to enable them

at the end of six months to take their place in a line with Savarna children of the same age. For this, kindliness was more essential in a teacher than scholarship. The Sangha would do well even to bring out a Harijan preparatory schoolmaster's guide, showing him how he should impart to his charges the cultural training which Savarna children received in their homes.

Fourthly, as regards Ashrams, he thought they had better fight shy of that big word and rather call their institutions 'Chhatralayas' (hostels) or 'Udyogalayas'. Personally he did not like that the institution at Sabarmati was called Harijan Ashram. In these hostels they might supplement the ordinary education of the inmates at schools by teaching them some industry and religion, not through text-books but in actual practice. The superintendent must see that the members used their hands and feet and told the truth in their actual lives, instead of merely reading copybook maxims about it. In fact, he should be as father to them. A couple of such institutions in each province should go a great way in the spread of culture and serve the purpose of comprehensive propaganda.

As regards total abstinence, Gandhiji said they could make an impression, only if they entered into the drunkards' lives and established an intimate personal relation with them. It was no use merely getting them to sign a pledge. They must find out the reasons why people took to drink. They must devise substitutes for it, such as milk and tea, and organize games, lectures and such other diversions.

Finally Gandhiji expressed his emphatic opinion that they had hardly touched the fringe of their problem so long as they had not penetrated into the villages, which were the stronghold of untouchability and where alone they could strike it a deathblow.

[A summary of Gandhiji's talk to the U. P. Harijan Workers at Kanpur.]

Harijan, 10-8-'34

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THE USE OF BONES

A correspondent in Rajputana says in substance :

> " Here, in our parts, wherever I look I find bones of animals strewing the paths. No one cares to collect them. Village surroundings therefore look like neglected crematoria. Dogs make worse what is already so bad. You have written now and again on this subject in the pages of *Harijan*. Will you not give summary instructions for guiding Harijan, and even village, workers ? It will be useless if you advise us to send the bones to some bone-grinding mill ; for the expense would be prohibitive. Then you have to consider the religious prejudice against the use of articles made of bones, etc."

The waste that is going on in this country is truly terrific. If, however, an economist were to work out figures of waste caused by the curse of untouchability, they will be staggering. The wages we are paying for the luxury of committing the sin of untouchability will comfortably feed the starving millions. It is no small waste deliberately to stunt the mental and moral growth, and to make the least economic use, of one-sixth of the population of India. But to state the problem in such large terms baffles one. For the workers who need not think in terms of millions, either of money or men, it is simple enough.

Religious values have to change. In a country like India, where animal life is held sacred, we must learn to regard as sacred the use, other than for food, of all parts of naturally dead animals. Harijan workers, I regard, as having advanced to the position here set forth. If they have, they would collect all the bones they thus see strewn about on village paths and put them by till they receive further instructions. I am trying to find out easy methods of grinding bones to powder. To turn them into manure seems to me to be the cheapest method of disposal.

Harijan, 20-4-'35

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A HARIJAN SEVAK'S DIFFICULTIES

A good Harijan Sevak, tested and true, was with us for a day. He had been plodding away for four years without much result; he had failed to get enough money for his institution from the Harijan Sevak Sangh; he had failed to enlist the sympathies of young men who would come for a few days, work with him for a time and leave abruptly as the work was so uninteresting; he had obstacles placed in his way by non-Brahmanas who alleged that by working for and among the Harijans he lowered their standard of living; even the Harijans were often a cause of despair inasmuch as they promised to lead cleaner lives and abjure drink and carrion, but many did not keep their pledges; and so on and so forth.

Gandhiji had no other message to give him than to plod on and persist. "What are four years in the life of a nation, and what is even a lifetime in the vast space of eternity, when one remembered that one had to conquer the prejudices of centuries? And have we tried enough and suffered enough? Look at Booker T. Washington. Have any of us suffered as much as he did? We narrate the woes of Harijans but do we ever share with them those woes? They are sharp-witted enough to see that we do not starve whilst it is they who have to starve, we have plenty of clean water to drink whereas they have dirty pools to depend upon.

"The Harijan Sevak Sangh does not give you money. Well, it is right from its point of view. We have begun at the wrong end; we rely on outside assistance instead of relying on our own strength. The time has come when we must cease to be spoon-fed. Why not teach the boys in the verandahs or their own sheds and make the school a natural growth from the soil? Why not get them to help you in growing your own grain and your vegetables and thus reduce the expenses of the boarding house? It is preposterous for a school, say in Trivandrum, to depend on Delhi.

It is so unnatural. It may have been necessary in the initial stages, but it should be no longer necessary now. The man in charge of the school depending for his salary on Delhi is a foreigner there. If he completely identifies himself with Harijans, they will share with him their meagre fare and will certainly not allow him to starve. It is no use looking up to the Central Board every now and then. The Central Board will keep the whole show nicely moving, but the sinews should come from the off-shoots, the Provincial Boards. But my mind is daily making so many discoveries that I feel that we might even dispense with collections. If we have no money we have other resources, if only we knew the art of discovering them.

"And why should the Harijans be the cause of despair? Show me many people who can keep their pledges. Have we kept all our pledges? And why do we make so much of their carrion-eating? We want them to give it up no doubt, but it is no use getting impatient with them. If many Savarna Hindus eat flesh, naturally they will eat carrion. There is hardly any chemical difference between meat and carrion. You will remember Dr. Deshmukh wrote to me that he would find it impossible to distinguish between fresh meat and fresh carrion. And the logic at least is with the Harijans. A rich Hindu may afford to have a goat killed for himself, but what is a poor Harijan to do? You will give him no live goat, and you will not allow him to eat a dead goat's flesh that chance throws in his way. No. We must realize that there is no vice among the Harijans that is not traceable to us. It is we who have to do all the penance. If crores of Savarna Hindus will give up meat-eating, Harijans will today give up carrion."

"Could we ask them to leave their wretched abodes and settle in our midst?"

"That is more easily said than done. If all Caste Hindus become reformers your question won't arise. Today the reformers would be powerless to defend Harijans from molestation if they settled in Savarna quarters. But I would advocate exodus by Harijans from where they are persistently persecuted, as by the Nattars for example."

"What about making them go through an *Upanayana* ceremony?"

"No, it involves the assumption that they are low and that they have got to be raised to a higher status. There is nothing low about them. Whatever appears to be low in them is a reflection of our own terrible lowness. Supposing I have a diseased child, what shall I do with it? Shall I discard it, shall I consider it low? No, I shall have to remind myself that it is suffering for my sins, and that therefore, it deserves extra care from me. But here with the Harijans, let me tell you that I literally hold that they are far superior to us. They have remained with us in spite of our persecution, and they are still clinging on to us. It is a marvel of marvels to me that they continue to hold on to a religion, of which some of the adherents say that it has no place for them. No, we must come down from the high pedestal we have occupied all these years and take our natural place with them."

Harijan 15-6-'35

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OUR DUTY

Perhaps the burden of untouchability falls on Harijans in one way nowhere so heavily as in Gujarat. In Dholka a Harijan was done to death by a Savarna Hindu and the murderer escaped with a fine of Rs 300. In Kavitha the so-called Rajputs mercilessly attacked helpless Harijans for daring to send their children to a public school. In Kathiawad just now in various villages in its various provinces Savarnas persecute Harijans because a plague has broken out among the cattle. They do so under the superstitious belief that the disease is caused owing to the incantations or some other machinations of Harijans. The Harijan is in perpetual fear of injury to his person or property. The reformer feels helpless; the State is indifferent or is itself also helpless in the face of the powerful Savarnas. The reason is obvious. The Harijan does not know

how to secure redress. He has no will to defend himself. He is wholly unconscious of his human dignity or innate ability to protect himself against the insolence of fellow human beings. The reformer has to carry the torch of knowledge among the persecutors, for they know not what they are doing. Leaflets may be distributed among them. But the Savarna lynchers rarely read newspapers or leaflets. They are self-contained and self-satisfied. Personal contact is the only way of approach to them. They must be visited if need be in their own homes. Meetings should be addressed in their villages. No amount of anger or declamation will cure them of their ignorance. The quickest way to combat ignorance is the spread of the knowledge that would tell them how cattle diseases are contracted and how by careful treatment they may be prevented or cured.

All this means patient labour on the part of those who will carry on the propaganda. The States concerned should also be moved to protect the poor Harijans who are molested. Where the reformers are fairly numerous they may have to settle in the midst of Harijans and themselves share their hardships, if their presence does not prevent molestation. In this campaign against ignorance the Sanatanists' assistance should also be invoked. I am sure no sane Sanatanist will defend the cruel persecution of the utterly innocent Harijans by ignorant, misguided Savarnas.

Harijan 31-8-'35

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MORE QUESTIONS

Shri T. N. Sarma of Andhradesh came to me the other day at Calcutta and asked me certain questions, regarding the difficulties found in the path of those who were serving the Panchamas. He has now reduced my answers to writing and sent them to me to correct and publish if possible. As they are likely to help workers, I gladly find room for the questions and my answers.

Q: 1. What methods do you suggest for propaganda for the removal of untouchability ?

A: Not much lip propaganda is necessary now. Work is propaganda. You should work fearlessly, unmindful of social ostracism, for bettering the condition of the 'untouchables'. Lectures may be arranged when leading men pay you a visit.

Q: 2. There are two shades of opinion in our Andhra Province and a resolution was proposed to the effect that money should not be spent for non-Panchamas to do propaganda work. Some people think that the Panchamas should be educated first and the demand for the removal should come from them, while others think that paid propaganda should be done among the higher classes to change their hearts, and to make them feel that untouchability is a sin, and Pandits and workers should be appointed to do this work.

A: I would not spend even a single pie over Pandits. If you pay them they become hirelings. They must not work for pay. Money should be spent on the Panchamas to make them realize their own position. Our methods should always be non-violent. Men of the so-called higher classes must change their attitude, and remove the ban for their own elevation and purification. If they do not do so and persist in suppressing them, time must come when the 'untouchables' will rebel against us, and may have recourse even to violent methods. I am trying my utmost to prevent such a

catastrophe, and so must we all do who believe untouchability to be a sin.

Q: 3. Do you think that schools started exclusively for the Panchamas will help in any way in removing untouchability ?

A: They must in the long run do so, as all education must. But such schools should not be exclusively Panchama schools as boys from other castes also should be welcomed. They will not come at present. But the prejudice will break down in time if the schools are well-managed. If you want mixed schools, you must start one in your locality. Suppose you own a house. Nobody can ask you to go away from your house. Bring an 'untouchable' boy to your house and start a school with him. Induce other boys to come and attend that school.

Q: 4. In our Province encouragement is given to the schools, where the children of both the untouchables and the touchables read together.

A: Yes. You may encourage them. But you should not refuse help to schools or institutions where there are only 'untouchables'.

Q: 5. In some Taluka Boards, there are orders that schools will be abolished if admission is refused to the untouchables. Do you advise us to help the Panchamas at such places in getting admission through our propagandists ?

A: Certainly. You should help them. But there is no need for special propagandists. Your workers will do for that purpose.

Q: 6. Then what about the propaganda work ? Do you think that silent work will do ?

A: Yes. There is no good of propaganda when there is no solid work behind to elevate the Panchamas. (In this connection, Gandhiji referred to the Vykom struggle, and said that it had a very tremendous effect on the people of those parts.)

Q: 7. Shall we spend money freely for propaganda at a time when such questions arise ?

A : Not freely. Solid work is its own propaganda. At Vykom most of the money is spent for constructive work.

Q : 8. Are you going to take up the question of untouchability more vigorously at any time in the near future ?

A : I have already taken up that question as vigorously as possible. We are trying to start schools, dig wells, and build temples etc. for them wherever it is possible. The work does not stop for want of money. Perhaps you are thinking that nothing is done for them, because it is not advertised in the papers.

Q : 9. According to the Belgaum resolution, no school can be called 'national' where Panchamas are refused admission.

A : Certainly. They are not national schools.

Q : 10. Do you say that such schools should not be given help from Congress funds, even though they satisfy all the other conditions to be called national schools ?

A : No help should be given.

Young India, 10-9-'25

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ON RECONVERSIONS

Q : What is to be our attitude to those who want to come back to Hinduism ?

A : We shall simply say to them : 'You are perfectly welcome.' But you will offer no inducements to those you expect to win back by doing so.

Q : Oh, no. That is out of the question. I was wondering if you would approve of any purification ceremony.

A : No purification ceremony is necessary. If they had become converts wantonly, they will regretfully come back, in which case those who take them back may ask them to do some Shuddhi. I would simply ask them to take Ramanama a hundred times.

Q : Won't you object to a Harijan Sevak attending a voluntary Shuddhi ceremony of this character ?

A: I see no objection to his attending such a ceremony, but let him be clear that Shuddhi is no part of the Harijan Sevak Sangh's programme, and also he should be sure that the man wanting to be reconverted was doing so absolutely freely and without the offer of any inducement. The question is: Are you convinced of the downright sincerity of the man wanting to be reconverted ? If you are, do everything to befriend him.

Harijan, 4-7-'36

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QUESTIONS OF HARIJAN WORKERS

Q: The work of removing untouchability seems to be insuperable. How exactly are we to tackle it ?

A: Silent plodding. I better tell you how I am doing it in Segaon. I do not preach to them, but work away never thinking of the result. The one condition is that you should not harbour untouchability in any shape or form. I have made it a point to have as many Harijans about me as possible. They come as servants but they soon know that they are brothers to us. We tolerate no distinction between Harijans. Though I cannot present you with tangible results of this silent service, I may safely say that there is a marked change for the better among all, — Harijans and the orthodox Hindus.

Q: It is not quite easy for the Harijans to leave their village where they feel like doing so, as in Kavitha. How can they get work ?

A: I still adhere to my advice. We should be ashamed of asking them to stay on in the village and suffer the continuing persecution. It should not be impossible for us to find work for them. The number of those who will migrate will never be large.

Q: The Bhangis' lot is pitiable in many places. How can they secure their elementary rights from municipalities ?

A : They must know that they are not bound to serve under all conditions. They may leave the work if the municipality will not listen to them. But we have to settle down in their midst and educate them, and not make reckless attempts to drive them to strike work. They must be taught to know that they have friends. Whilst they, like others, have the right to go on strike, they should know its limitations. They should be taught to regard their work as equally dignified with all other social services. I have no doubt that they are the most neglected social servants and deserve every assistance we can render them.

Q : What is the outlook, in view of the precarious financial position of our Ashrams and institutions today ?

A : It is not our financial position but our moral position that is precarious. You know the instances of moral lapse that have occurred. Purity is the only social foundation. No movement or activity that has the sure foundation of purity of character of its workers, is ever in danger to come to an end for want of funds. Then we in Gujarat have to realize that we must not always depend only on our moneyed men. We have to tap humbler resources. Our middle classes and even poor classes support so many beggars, so many temples, why will they not support a few good workers ? We must beg from door to door, beg grain, beg copper coins, do as they do in Bihar and Maharashtra. In Maharashtra they have *paisa* funds and *mushti* funds (*mushti* means a handful). It will be the finest form of propaganda among Caste Hindus. But remember everything will depend on the singleness of your purpose, your devotion to the task and the purity of your character. People won't give for such work unless they are sure of our selflessness.

Q : What about the Harijans turned Christians who are today no better than Harijans ?

A : Everything will be all right the moment untouchability disappears. When there is no untouchability, there will be no occasion for them to label themselves otherwise than as Hindus. I am talking of nominal Christians. If we put our own house in order, we need have no

anxiety about Harijans, changing religion as people change clothes.

Q: If it is impossible to get the Caste Hindus' co-operation in anti-untouchability work, would it not be better to take up the village industries work?

A: That is a delusion. You may be sure that he who gives up Harijan work on a pretext like that will be able to do less for the village industries work. You can't settle down in a village and miss the Harijans who are the foundation of society.

Harijan, 28-11-'36

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HINDU FESTIVALS

A correspondent writes:

> "Shri Ganesh Utsava started by the late Lokamanya is coming near; most of our Ministers and leaders will be invited by various associations to speak on this occasion. I desire to suggest to the speakers that they should accept such invitations, provided that the management would allow Harijans to take part in the function; they should also make it a point to take at least one Harijan with them, when they go to address the congregation."

The above suggestion is apt. If Caste Hindus really wish to stamp out untouchability, they should publicly associate Harijans with them, especially on such occasions as the celebration of Hindu festivals.

Harijan, 25-8-'46

SECTION SEVENTEEN: HARIJAN SEVAK SANGH

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AS THEY SEE US

Hardly has the great central organization of the Servants of Untouchables Society made the commencement, when complaints against it and the provincial organizations have cropped up. They come chiefly and naturally from Harijans. One of these correspondents sent to me some time ago an able letter, undertaking to give details if I desired. I took him at his word and asked him to give me details; and the letter he has sent me in reply is abler than the first. It will compete with any well written report of an inspector. It contains a summary of reports of every organization claiming to work in the writer's province for the uplift of Harijans, and after giving me sufficient details, his one conclusion about all the organizations practically without exception is:

> "They are run principally by Caste men who have their own axes to grind or who are in need of some occupation that would maintain them decently. The utmost that some of these have done is to fling a few scholarships at Harijan boys. Some others have been great at delivering lectures. All have come to us as patrons. Hardly has anyone come as a friend and equal, let alone as a servant. Your provincial organization is no exception. It is difficult for a Harijan to approach its chief man without fear and trembling. He is always in danger of being met with a frown."

My correspondent is also not without suggestions, which may be summarized thus:

> "If you are to take advantage of the great awakening that has taken place, you must concentrate upon primary education on a mass scale. You will not drive out the ignorance of ages without spreading that education. We shall certainly help, but seeing that Caste Hindus want to remove untouchability and make us one with them, there is no better way of employing their money and their labour than in imparting this education."

It is necessary to know the Harijan mind in any programme of work that may be taken up. Caste Hindus, for

whom removal of untouchability is a matter of penance and purification, have undoubtedly to do much more than open schools everywhere. I have discussed elsewhere * where such schools may be opened. The conduct of Caste Hindus would be generally tested by its reaction upon the mass mind of the Harijans. If we have really changed towards them, they will feel the change in a thousand ways. Our activity, I mean that of Caste Hindus, will affect every department of their lives. Even in the remotest village we are interdependent, so much so that this interdependence cannot be dissolved all at once, even if we desired it, without resulting in the greatest harm to the nation in general ; and this interdependence, which is today that of slave and master, will never be corrected unless there is absolute religious equality. It is a tremendous task, but as we progress towards the goal, the truth must dawn upon every Caste Hindu that there is no halfway house between abject slavery and perfect religious equality. Hence my humble insistence upon temple-entry without losing sight of the other things we must do.

My correspondent is bitter in discussing what he considers to be the extravagant management of the different organizations that have come under his lash. As an expert organizer that I may claim to be, I have been generally guided by the rule that the cost of administration, that is, overhead charges, should never exceed 10 per cent of the receipts — 5 per cent being the ideal — the balance going to the cause which brought the organization into being. I suggest this test to the Central Board and the Provincial Boards and all other independent Harijan organizations run by Caste Hindus. Let it not be said of us that we spend more on running the organizations than upon Harijans themselves. Let us see to it that, out of every 100 Rs received as donation for the Harijan cause, Rs 90 go straight into the pockets of Harijans. Therefore, our officials should be largely volunteers, never highly paid wherever paid service is required. Wherever it is possible,

* Refer to previous chap. 157.

we should get Harijans. We should select candidates and train them. The correspondent says that peons in the organizations inspected by him are not drawn from the Harijan ranks.

Let every organization for the service of Harijans introspect itself in the light of the criticism I have condensed and the suggestions I have made.

Harijan, 4-3-'33

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HARIJAN DAY

The fixing of a special day can only be warranted by extraordinary effort. In a sacred cause like the Harijan cause, a special day should be one of greater dedication, prayer and intensive work.

I should divide the day somewhat after this style :

1. I should begin the day from 5 a.m. with prayer and set apart for the cause some money or cloth or grain according to my means. The poorest can do this by denying themselves a meal or meals or a portion thereof without feeling the slightest deprivation. Preferably donations in kind should be converted into cash. Where this is not possible, they should be given to the most deserving and needy Harijans.

2. The work of the family Bhangi, if there is any, should be wholly done by the family or at least shared with him. This will enable one to understand the nature of the service that the Bhangi performs and may also lead to an improved method of performing such services. Not many persons have any consideration for the 'knight of the broom' at the time of using the sanitary conveniences. If we had no untouchability in us and if we even occasionally shared the work with the Bhangis, we would have a different method of working the home sanitary system.

3. Having done these two things, we are ready for corporate effort for the day, which should open with house

to house collection of donations in cash or kind. This work should be finished by a given hour. The donations should be handed to the local committee, which will in its turn, hand the collection to the superior committee till it reaches the headquarters of the province. Collectors should take with them a judicious selection of literature including leaflets, pamphlets, books and even copies of *Harijan*, English or vernacular edition as may be required. The literature should be sold or given away as the exigency of the moment may require. But each committee should bear the cost of the literature ordered by it. If extra copies of the *Harijan* are required, previous advice should be given to the publishers so as to enable them to print extra copies.

4. Harijan quarters should be visited in each place and they should be cleaned wherever necessary. Meetings of Harijans should be held and their wants noted. They should be advised as to the part they have to play in the removal of untouchability. Dr. Deshmukh's authoritative opinion should be used in support of the plea for the giving up of carrion-eating. Children can arrange meetings and excursions for Harijan children. Possibilities of inauguration of improved methods of sanitation should be explored. It is neither difficult nor expensive if the people will shoulder the burden willingly. In the end it means a visible addition to the health and wealth of the community.

5. The day should be wound up by a general meeting of both Savarnas and Harijans to pass resolutions, pledging the meeting to the removal of untouchability and emphasizing the desirability of permissive legislation regarding temple-entry.

6. Where public opinion is favourable, public wells and private temples should be opened to Harijans.

An accurate report of the work done should be sent to the Central Committee.

Harijan, 15-4-'33

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DEBTORS AND CREDITORS

[At Rajahmundry a deputation of Harijans met Gandhiji and had a long talk with him. They argued, among other things, that, as they had sufficient men among them who were enlightened and efficient, they should be entrusted with the reins of the Harijan Sevak Sangh. Caste Hindus, they said, might help in the work, but the office-bearers should be all Harijans. Gandhiji gave them the following reply :]

" One important question that you have raised is that the Harijan Sevak Sangh should be principally manned and managed by you. That shows that you have not followed the pages of the *Harijan*. That shows also that you have not understood the origin of the Board. The Board has been formed to enable Savarna Hindus to do repentance and reparation to you. It is thus a Board of debtors, and you are the creditors. You owe nothing to the debtors, and therefore, so far as this Board is concerned, the initiative has to come from the debtors. You have to certify whether the debtors discharge their obligation or not. What you have to do is to enable and help them to discharge their obligation ; that is to say, you can tell them how they can discharge their obligation, you can tell them what, in your opinion, will satisfy the great body of Harijans. They may or may not accept your advice. If they do not, naturally they run the risk of incurring your displeasure. A debtor may go to a creditor and say to him, 'I have brought so much money, will you take it ? ' The creditor may say, 'Off you go ; I want full payment or none.' Or the creditor may say, 'What you have brought is not part payment, but worse.' All these things you, creditors, can do. And so, when this Board was established and some Harijan friends wrote to me, I told them that Harijans should form themselves into Advisory Boards or Boards of Inspection. I want you to understand this distinction thoroughly. You will please see that there is no desire not to accept your advice or co-operation or help. I am only putting before you the true and logical position. This is a

period of grace that God has given to Caste Hindus, and it is during this period of grace that they have to prove their sincerity. And I am moving heaven and earth and am going about from place to place, simply in order that this obligation on the part of Savarna Hindus may be fully discharged."

A member of the deputation then suggested that the Board should appoint Advisory Committees of Harijans of its own selection. Gandhiji, 'as a fellow Harijan by choice', showed them the danger underlying this suggestion and said, "Do not ask the Board to select a Committee of Harijans, but select your own Committee and say to the Board, you have elected these members and it should carry on correspondence with them. There is another danger in the suggestion. There may be factions and divisions among you. Different committees may be appointed by different factions. The Board may recognize all of them. But that will be unfortunate. Let there be no quarrels among you. Present a united front to the debtors. The debtors may put you against one another, though the Board, if it is worth its name, will not do that. The Congress has been able to present a united front. Today, the Congress is full of simple men like you and me. You should have a body of business-like men who will put down with a strong hand all quarrels among you. Then you will dominate the Board without being on it. Do not be easily satisfied. Tell the debtors you are not going to be satisfied with 5 shillings in the pound but that you must have 20 shillings in the pound. This is not a matter for bargaining."

Harijan, 5-1-'34

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ADVISORY COMMITTEES

[Gandhiji had suggested the formation of Advisory Committees of Harijans to assist Harijan Sevak Sangh Boards consisting of Caste Hindus. When asked for guidance in this matter by a Harijan correspondent, Gandhiji replied :]

"I should suggest the formation of compact, small representative Committees who would truly represent the opinion of local Harijans. They would frame rules for the conduct of their proceedings and formulate their expectations of Savarna Hindus and generally watch the proceedings of Harijan Boards. These Advisory Committees, wherever they are formed, would advise Harijan Boards of their existence and show their preparedness to help the latter. If the Boards are sincere in their desire to discharge their debt, that is, to serve Harijans, they will establish the friendliest contact with the Advisory Committees, and perfect co-operation and harmony will prevail. There may be friction in the beginning because of mutual suspicion. Harijan Boards, being naturally better organized and better off in every respect, will have to exercise tact in handling what may appear to be extravagant demands. Advisory Committees would endeavour to be considerate. The more considerate they are, the better able they will be to help themselves. From their ability to conduct themselves in a dignified manner, they will learn the art of asserting themselves if the occasion ever arises. For they should know that Savarna Hindus will never be able to discharge their debt except with the co-operation of Harijans. But the question of asserting themselves does not arise just yet, because the vast mass of Harijans have been rendered so completely helpless that they have no power of resisting injustice, even if they wanted to. Let me explain what I mean. Harijan Boards have three functions, to raise the economic, social and religious status of Harijans, or to put it in another way, to remove the difficulties that Savarna Hindus have for centuries put in the way of Harijans raising their heads in any department of life.

Thus the Harijan Boards have to provide wells, scholarships, boarding houses, schools and social amenities, wherever the need arises. In all these, the general body of Harijans simply take the help wherever it is offered. Advisory Committees can, therefore, help the cause and themselves by making useful suggestions to the Boards and also rendering such help as they themselves can to those whom they represent. Thus only will they acquire the power of asserting themselves. In short, Advisory Committees will best help the cause by taking up internal reform and causing an awakening among the Harijan masses, so that they may begin to realize that they are men and women entitled to the same rights as are enjoyed by the other members of the society to which they belong.

Harijan, 20-4-'34

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HARIJAN BOARDS

What should be the qualifications of members of Harijan Boards and what should be the number constituting them are the questions often asked. Only those will be included who are eager to serve the cause and whose presence will promote the usefulness of the Board to which they belong and whose capacity for service will be increased by their being members of a Board.

No one should allow himself or herself to be a member of a Board, unless he or she

(1) believes in the uttermost removal of untouchability ;

(2) pays something to the Board according to his or her capacity ;

(3) does some definite Harijan service, e.g. having a Harijan in his or her home as a member of the family, or at least as a domestic servant, or his teaching a Harijan or Harijans, or paying a regular visit to Harijan quarters and cleaning them, or, if he or she is a doctor, treating Harijan patients free of charge, etc. ;

(4) sends to the Board a diary containing a record of his or her service from month to month.

If some such conditions are observed, there need be no restriction on the number of members. The more, the merrier. Such Boards will meet to take notes, exchange experiences and solve mutual difficulties. They will never waste time in fruitless discussions.

There may be Advisory Committees attached to the Boards. These will lay down for themselves some minimum qualifications. Naturally the qualifications of Advisers will be less stringent than those of members of regular Boards.

What if members with the qualifications I have described cannot be found is the natural question arising from the bare mention of them. I must repeat the answer I have given often enough before now. The persons invited by the Central Board to form Sanghs in their own provinces will, in the absence of members having the necessary qualifications, perform the service through agents. "Act True" must be the motto of every Harijan Board, and there should never be any departure from the wholesome maxim.

Harijan, 9-11-'34

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DECENTRALIZATION ?

Though I have concurred in the policy of centralization I have always desired, as I have no doubt the Board too has desired, decentralization at the first opportunity. But that could only be done when the Provincial Boards were ready and able to raise their own funds. I would love nothing so much as that every village had its Harijan Board and was able to find its own funds. When that day comes, it will also be one of complete abolition of untouchability in every shape and form. For the present it has to be unfortunately admitted that the cause is still led by a handful of earnest reformers scattered all over the country.

Not all of them are able to raise funds locally nor are they all sure of the policy to be followed. I use the word policy deliberately. For while everyone knows the goal, everyone does not know the grave limitations under which the reformer labours. The slightest error of judgment, a hasty action or a hasty word may put back the hands of the clock of progress. Policies have, therefore, to be cautiously evolved in the light of experiences daily gained by the few who have no other thought but that of serving Harijans and ridding Hinduism of its greatest blot.

Harijan, 17-8-'35

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TASK BEFORE HARIJAN SEVAKS

Ever since the inauguration of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, the central organization has been feeding, very properly, the provincial branches. But the time has certainly arrived for the branches to stand on their own and be self-sustained even though it may be at the sacrifice of a part of their programme. The work in each province, and for that matter in each district or taluka, should be an unequivocal demonstration of active Savarna support. For the chief mission of the Sangh is to touch the Savarna heart and change it. Supposing the central organization had collected from two or three reformers a crore of rupees, and with it established branches all over India to cover it with schools and hostels for Harijan boys and girls, it would not have hastened the day of the doom of untouchability. For the Savarna heart would remain as stony as ever. Supposing conversely that without the cost of a single pice, by some stroke of good fortune, the Savarna heart was changed and untouchability became a thing of the past, the whole object of the Sangh would be fulfilled. For in that case every public school, place of worship and other institutions would be open to Harijans precisely on the same terms as to Caste Hindus. That day may be far off or much nearer than many people expect. Anyway that

is the goal of the Harijan Sevak Sangh, and never the opening of separate schools, wells, temples and the like for Harijans and consequent perpetuation of untouchability. At present these things are undoubtedly done, but they are done only as a means to *the* end. They have become necessary because the Savarna heart is slow to change.

The growing number of reformers must not sit still and make protestations of removal of untouchability from themselves. They must demonstrate that change by their visible conduct. The spending of their purse for the Harijan cause is a tangible proof of the change and therefore an essential part of the programme. But immediately it becomes a corner confined to a few individuals who salve their conscience by liberal donations, it ceases to be a token in the manner indicated by me. Hence it becomes a matter of duty for the Central Board to invite the attention of the branches to this fundamental part of the programme and for the branches to appreciate it and prepare the way to becoming wholly self-reliant. Indeed the burden has been progressively thrown on provincial boards of financing their own institutions. But the time has come for definite and decisive action in the direction.

This change to full self-reliance will never come unless all the workers realize that this is essentially a religious movement. We are a nation spending lavishly for causes which the masses believe to be religious. One has only to go to the places of pilgrimage to have an ocular demonstration of the fact. A study of the history of religious endowments will reveal the tragic story of fortunes being entrusted to them by credulous millions without ever caring to know how they were spent. It is enough for people to believe that they pay their mite to a cause which in their opinion is religious. Harijan workers have a cause that is wholly religious in the best sense of the term. If they have a living faith in it, if they do not move mountains, they will at least get from their surroundings enough for the institutions in their charge.

Harijan, 10-10-'36

QUESTIONS AT THE HARIJAN SEVAK SANGH CONFERENCE

Q: The Harijan Sevak Sangh is looked upon as a part of the Congress. But very few Congressmen are Harijan workers. Why?

A: The Sangh is not a part of the Congress. It was the outcome of the fast I undertook in 1932 when I was in jail. The meeting of Hindus drawn from every class, which was held under the presidentship of Pandit Malaviyaji and which gave birth to the Sangh, deliberately decided to keep the organization separate from the Congress and non-political. It was this quality of the Sangh that enabled Seth G. D. Birla to become its President and Shri Thakkar Bapa its Secretary. Nevertheless there are and ought to be many Congressmen in the Sangh, because practically all reformers are drawn into the Congress fold. But it is true that there are plenty of non-Congress persons in the Sangh. It is also true that those Congressmen who are only interested in politics do not come into it. It is, therefore, sometimes wrongly thought that Congressmen do not take an interest in the Sangh. It is the duty of every Congressman to remove untouchability, root and branch, from his life.

Q: Harijan service has really developed into mere Harijan uplift. Practically no work is done among Caste Hindus for the removal of untouchability. What is the remedy for this?

A: Experience shows that propaganda among Caste Hindus can only be successfully carried out by influential persons whose word carries weight with the general public. Such persons are hard to find. But it is within the capacity of every Harijan worker to carry on mute propaganda. Our Caste Hindu workers are often satisfied with mere uplift work among the Harijans, which is not sufficient. Many workers, while they do not observe untouchability themselves, are unable even to convert their own families. How

then can they influence the outside world? Moreover it is my confirmed opinion that every Harijan worker has to make a point to beg for even one pice for Harijans from those Caste Hindus with whom he comes in contact. If all devoted themselves, heart and soul, to this task, very good results would ensue.

Q: Should not the Sangh take upon itself the service of those Harijans who have been converted to Christianity or Islam and are yet treated as untouchables? Are we not out to remove untouchability root and branch and therefore help all who come under its sway?

A: This question has already been answered in the columns of *Harijan* but must bear repetition so long as it is raised. The moment untouchability is utterly banished from Hindu society it will, *ipso facto*, disappear from elsewhere too. Whatever the merits or demerits of the case, it is clear that our interference with converts will be the cause of strife with Muslims and Christians. Such converts have either broken off all contacts with, or they have been in their turn boycotted by, Hindus. They have thrown in their lot with other sects whose leaders will not allow them to maintain their old contacts. Hence the Harijan Sevak Sangh quite rightly decided from its inception to confine its area of work to Harijans who had not left the Hindu fold. A convert, having left his original fold, is no longer guided or controlled by it.

Q: What should be the attitude of the Sangh, if Harijan boys wish to enlist in the army?

A: They should be allowed to do so. They may not be controlled by the Congress policy or Ahimsa. They must be given absolute freedom of choice.

Q: Harijans are of opinion that Caste Hindus who are sympathetic to their cause should not use those temples where they are not allowed entry.

A: They are right. It is the bounden duty of Harijan workers not to go where Harijans are not allowed and likewise to dissuade Caste Hindus.

Q : Harijans are legally entitled to send their children to many educational institutions as also to draw water from public wells. But public sentiment still militates against this being put into practice. Should Harijans resort to the law courts for justice in these matters or wait patiently until the Caste Hindus are converted ?

A : Where there is no danger of violence being done to them, the Harijans should exercise their legal right and where necessary, resort to law courts. Harijan workers must continue agitation among Caste Hindus and not rest content with mere legal rights.

Q : Is it not essential to reform the insanitary methods employed by sweepers for cleaning latrines and scavenging ?

A : It is most necessary. What is more, until this is done the condition of sweepers will remain pitiable. To this end it is the duty of Harijan workers and Caste Hindus to do sweepers' work themselves. No Caste Hindu will employ the methods used by sweepers. He will do the work scientifically. For example, he will never remove excreta in a basket or carry it on his head ; he will cover excreta with dry earth and remove it in a metal vessel. He will avoid touching dirt with his hands as far as possible ; he will clean the vessels with water and a rod ; he will bathe immediately after doing the work ; he will wear special clothes when scavenging. These reforms do not cost much. They require intelligence, hard work, and love of an ideal. We may not relegate sweepers' work to one particular class. Therefore all should learn it in the same way as cooking. Each person should be his own sweeper. If this ideal were to be put into practice in society, the miserable condition of sweepers would at once be rectified.

Harijan, 10-5-'42

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HARIJAN SEVAK SANGH UNDER FIRE

Q: The Communist Party has successfully organized sweepers' unions and helped them to secure their rights through *hartals* etc. But the Harijan Sevak Sangh's activities are confined mostly to welfare work. It cannot therefore successfully compete with the Communists for popularity among the Harijans. Don't you think that in view of this, the Harijan Sevak Sangh ought to alter its policy and method of work ?

A: We must be guided in our policy by our sense of right, not by the lure of winning cheap popularity. If the Harijan Sevak Sangh is convinced that it is working on the right line, it will keep on to it, regardless of what others might or might not do. Thus we may organize unions or even induce *hartals*, not from political motives or for such purposes, but for bettering the social or economic position of Harijans.

Q: The feeling is gaining ground among the Harijans that the Congress is showing more solicitude for Muslim demands than for the just rights of the Harijans. What have you to say to it ?

A: The Congress being a political organization is likely to be more susceptible to political pressure, which the Muslims are in a far stronger position to exert than the Harijans. If it succumbs to that pressure, it will pay the price for it. The Harijan Sevak Sangh, however, being a non-political organization should never put expediency before its primary duty towards the Harijans.

Q: Would you advise the so-called Savarna Hindus to start, even under the present circumstances an agitation in selected places for securing elementary civic and social rights for the Harijans ? Would you for this purpose advise the Harijan Sevak Sangh to organize Satyagraha against the Savarna Hindus if necessary ?

A : I would not advise the Sangh as an organization to offer Satyagraha against the Savarna Hindus, but I would certainly not only advise but expect members of the Sangh in their individual capacity to organize such Satyagraha in their respective places. I shall certainly support any such move on their part if it is undertaken in the proper spirit. It is their duty.

Q : Would you, in the absence of popular Governments in the provinces, advise the Sangh to carry on a vigorous and energetic programme of temple-entry for Harijans?

A : I could. I understand it is being done even at present but at a rather slow pace. I would certainly like its tempo to be stepped up.

Q : Should not the Harijan Sevak Sangh try to secure for the Harijans political power by demanding due representation for them on Grama Panchayats, municipalities and legislatures?

A : Certainly it ought to. No effort can be too great for it.

Q : Should not the Sangh give instructions in the essentials of Hindu religion in the Harijan hostels and in Harijan gatherings of adults?

A : It ought to be the primary duty of the Sangh to give to Harijan children and adults a grounding in the essentials of Hindu religion. If they were brought up in ignorance of these, they would not continue to remain in the Hindu fold, and the responsibility for it would rest on those who had failed to give them the necessary instructions.

Shri Sitaram Shastri of Vinaya Ashram, Guntur, asked whether the Sangh ought not to specially train a body of missionaries to carry on propaganda work among the Savarna Hindus. He was prepared to start a training centre for that purpose in his Ashram if he were given adequate help.

Gandhiji however had grave doubts as to the practicability of the suggestion. In fact the question had actually been raised by Shri Ghanashyamdas Birla several years

ago and dropped after full discussion. He would be quite satisfied if at least the members of the Sangh would fully come up to the ideal.

Gandhiji was next asked : "Ought not we to set up a precedent for having Harijan representatives in the Sangh or at least one member in the Executive Committee of the Sangh ?" In reply he referred to the history of the birth of the Harijan Sevak Sangh at the conclusion of the Poona Pact, which resulted in the modification of the decision of the MacDonald Government, on the question of the representation of the minorities. It was felt that if the rot was to be effectively stopped Hinduism ought to be completely rid of the curse of untouchability. This called for a real change of heart and repentance for its past sins on the part of Hindu society. It was to that end that the Harijan Sevak Sangh was formed.

"I am therefore opposed to both the propositions" proceeded Gandhiji. "I know that under the present arrangement some Harijans are included in the Board of the Sangh. But this was a concession to Thakkar Bapa's weakness. I have described the Harijan Sevak Sangh as an organization of penitent sinners. Its object is to call upon the so-called Savarna Hindus to do expiation for having harboured untouchability. The inclusion of a Harijan in the Sangh would be mere eye-wash and make-believe, as his would be a mere voice in the wilderness. Before long, he would himself heartily wish to be out of it. I say this from my personal experience of the way in which committees function. I know the Sangh cannot always keep up to the mark. It is of course open to the Sangh to alter its scope and give Harijans a majority in its Executive Committee or appoint a competent body of representative Harijans to act as a Board of Advisers and Supervisors and keep the Sangh on the alert and on the right track."

Gandhiji was next asked to give his opinion on the recent work in the Gwalior State to enlist the services of the Sadhu community in the cause of Harijan uplift. Gandhiji replying said he had grave doubts to the correctness or advisability of the step. It seemed to him to smack

of politics. He would welcome the assistance of true Sadhus, if it was available. But he confessed, he looked in vain in the country for Sadhus of his conception. Such Sadhus as he saw disappointed him. There might be here and there honourable exceptions and their help would be welcome. But he was frankly sceptical of the possibility of utilizing Sadhus as a body for their work. Even if they tried the experiment, he was afraid they would come to the parting of the ways before long.

Another friend asked whether a portion of the Kasturba Memorial Trust Fund ought not to be earmarked for Harijan sisters. Gandhiji's reply was that they could have the whole of it if they could show the capacity to utilize it. No special earmarking of a part was therefore necessary.

Final Diagnosis and Remedy

The questions and answers finished, Gandhiji addressed a few general remarks to those assembled to give his diagnosis of the relative sluggishness of the Harijan Sevak Sangh's activities and his remedy for the same. "I am responsible for the policy of conducting Harijan uplift work through the agency of the Savarna Hindus. They had to do expiation. All of them, I argued to myself, could help with money even if they could not, owing to lack of necessary qualifications, render direct service. For instance, they might not be able themselves to do teaching work, but they could engage a competent teacher to give education to Harijan children. That would be one way of doing expiation. They would be able to penetrate Harijan society and help in its progress." He knew there were sceptical critics, who questioned whether this kind of work could lead to the eradication of untouchability. He himself was at one time among the doubters. But he had since realized his mistake. He owed a debt of gratitude in this respect to the late Shri Devdhar, at whose activity he had at one time looked askance and which he had even criticized. A year's experience, however, had cured him of his conceit and taught him humility. He realized that if he confined

himself exclusively to doing propaganda among the Savarna Hindus with a view to their conversion, he might have to wait till the Greek Kalends and in the meantime the actual uplift work among the Harijans would remain hopelessly bogged. His own experience has since convinced him that if they could only have sufficient workers with the requisite purity and devotion and spirit of sacrifice to work among Harijans, untouchability would become a thing of the past, even if the Savarna Hindus were left severely alone. But that would mean that they must become Harijans at heart and live and labour among the Harijans as Harijans. "But can the members of the Harijan Sevak Sangh truthfully claim to have eradicated the last trace of untouchability from their own hearts? Are their professions altogether on a par with their practice?" he asked.

A member asked as to what his criterion was in that respect. "Are you married?" questioned Gandhiji in return. "I happen to be," replied the puzzled interlocutor. "Then have you an unmarried daughter?" resumed Gandhiji. "If you have, get for her a Harijan bridegroom not to satisfy her lust but in a purely religious spirit and I shall send you a wire of congratulations at my expense."

"You will now realize," continued Gandhiji, "why the Harijan Sevaks are unable to move the hearts of the Savarna Hindus. The reason is that they have not that fire of faith in their hearts, that impatient hunger for service which is the first essential for an effective appeal. Let but a handful of Savarna Hindus go forth in that true missionary spirit and they will leaven the entire Hindu mass. But not even a whole army of missionaries so-called will produce any effect upon them." It needed a Malaviyaji to make such a missionary. He (Gandhiji) could not convert his own sister. And if he could not, argued he, how could he blame others? That would show how hard and thorny was that path. It was however, open to them if they felt that they had the necessary qualification, to try the experiment for themselves in their locality.

The reason for this partial failure, Gandhiji proceeded to explain, was also that the approach of most of the members of the Harijan Sevak Sangh to their mission was not unmixed with political motives. If they really wanted to penetrate the hearts of Savarna Hindus, they ought to be filled with a purely religious spirit. Mere dialectics was a poor weapon for this kind of work. As it was, they were too much weighed down by inertia, heedlessness and woodenness of mind.

"The other method is more fierce and not altogether free from danger," continued Gandhiji. "It is the method of fasting." He himself had before condemned fasting when it seemed to him to be wrong or morally unjustified. But to shirk a fast when there was a clear moral indication was a dereliction from duty. Such a fast had to be based on unadulterated Truth and Ahimsa.

Harijan, 28-7-'46

SECTION EIGHTEEN: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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PERTINENT QUESTIONS

1. What are the practical steps to be taken to remove untouchability?

(a) To open to 'untouchables' all public schools, temples and roads that are open to non-Brahmanas and are not exclusively devoted to any particular caste.

(b) For Caste Hindus to open schools for their children, to dig wells for them where they are in need and to render them all personal service that they may need, e.g. to carry on temperance and hygiene reform among them and to provide them with medical aid.

2. What would be the religious status of the 'untouchables' when the ban of untouchability is completely removed?

The religious status would be the same as that of the Caste Hindus. They will therefore be classed as Shudras instead of Ati-Shudras.

3. What would be the relation between the 'untouchable' and the high caste orthodox Brahmana, when untouchability is removed?

The same as with non-Brahmana Hindus.

4. Do you advocate inter-mingling of castes?

I would abolish all castes and would keep the four divisions.

5. Why should not the 'untouchables' build temples for their own worship, without interfering with the existing temples?

The 'higher' castes have not left them much capacity for such enterprise. It is the wrong way of looking at the question to say that they interfere with our temples. We the so-called higher caste men have to do our duty by admitting them to the temples common to all Hindus.

6. Are you an advocate of communal representation, and do you hold that the 'untouchables' must have representation in all administrative bodies?

I am not. But if the 'untouchables' are purposely shut out by the influential castes, it would be an improper exclusion barring the road to Swaraj. My disapproval of communal representation does not mean exclusion of any community from representation but on the contrary, it lays the burden on the represented communities to see to the proper representation of the unrepresented or inadequately represented communities.

7. Are you a believer in the efficacy of Varnashrama Dharma?

Yes. But there is today a travesty of Varna, no trace of Ashram and a misrepresentation of Dharma. The whole system needs to be revised and brought in unison with the latest discoveries in the field of religion.

8. Don't you believe that India is Karma Bhumi, and that everybody born here is endowed with wealth and intelligence, social status and religious aspirations according to his good or ill deeds in his previous birth?

Not in the sense the correspondent means. For everybody everywhere reaps as he sows. But India is essentially Karma Bhumi (Land of Duty) in contradistinction to Bhoga Bhumi (Land of Enjoyment).

9. Is not education and reform among the 'untouchables' a primary condition to be fulfilled ere one can begin to talk of the removal of untouchability?

There can be no reform or education among the 'untouchables' without the removal of untouchability.

10. Is it not natural and just as it should be, that non-drunkards avoid drunkards, and that vegetarians avoid non-vegetarians?

Not necessarily. A teetotaller would regard it as his duty to associate with his drunkard brother for the purpose of weaning him from the evil habit. So may a vegetarian seek out a non-vegetarian.

11. Is it not true, that a pure man (in the sense that he is a teetotaller and vegetarian), easily becomes an impure man (in the sense that he becomes a drunkard and non-vegetarian), when he is made to mingle with men, who drink, and kill, and eat animals ?

A man who being unconscious of the wrong, drinks wine and eats flesh foods, is not necessarily an impure man. But I can understand the possibility of evil resulting from one being made to mingle with a corrupt person. In our case, however, there is no case of making anyone associate with 'untouchables'.

12. Is it not owing to the above fact that a certain class of orthodox Brahmanas do not mingle with the other castes (including the 'untouchables') but constitute themselves into a separate class, and live together for their spiritual uplift ?

It must be a poor spirituality that requires to be locked up in a safe. Moreover the days are gone when men used to guard their virtue by permanent isolation.

13. Would you not be interfering with the religions and caste-system (Varnashrama Dharma) of India whatever may be the bad or good points of the above system and religions, if you advocate the removal of untouchability ?

How do I interfere with anything or anybody by mere advocacy of a reform ? Interference there would be, if I were to advocate removal of untouchability by the use of force against those who retain untouchability.

14. Would you not be guilty of doing Himsa to the orthodox Brahmanas if you interfere with their religious beliefs without convincing them in the first instance ?

I cannot be guilty of Himsa to the orthodox Brahmanas as I do not interfere with their religious belief except through conviction.

15. Are not the Brahmanas guilty of untouchability, when they do not touch, dine with or marry the various other castes, leaving alone the 'untouchables' ?

Brahmanas are guilty of the sin if they refuse to 'touch' the other castes.

16. Does it satisfy the hunger of the 'untouchable' when he is made to parade Brahmana Agraharams, in the exercise of his right as a man?

Man does not live by bread alone. Many prefer self-respect to food.

17. Does not Satyagraha in this direction lead to violence, seeing that the 'untouchables' are not so well educated as to understand the full doctrine of non-violent non-co-operation, and also seeing that the Brahmana cares more for his religion than for politics?

If reference is to Vykom, experience shows that the 'untouchable' has shown amazing self-restraint. The latter part of the question suggests the possibility of violence by the Brahmanas concerned. I should be sorry if they resort to violence. They would then have shown, in my opinion, not regard for religion, but ignorance of and contempt for religion.

18. Do you advocate that all should become equal, without [illegible] of caste, race, creed or avocation?

higher caste Hindus and increase mutual love and [illegible]
Do you approve of this suggestion?

[illegible] in the matter of elementary human rights, even as, irrespective of caste, race, creed or colour, we have certain things in common, e.g. hunger, thirst etc.

19. Would that supreme philosophical truth be of any use in the field of practical politics, to the average Grihastha or householder, seeing that only great souls, who have come to the end of their cycle of Karma, could realize and practise that supreme philosophical truth, and not the ordinary Grihastha, who has only to follow what the Rishis have ordained, and in that following, get discipline which consequently leads to release from birth and death?

No such 'supreme philosophical truth' is involved in the recognition of the simple truth that no human being is to be regarded as untouchable by reason of his birth. The truth is so simple that it is recognized all over the world except by orthodox Hindus. I have questioned the statement that the Rishis taught the doctrine of untouchability as we practise it.

Young India, 5-2-'25

A STRING OF QUESTIONS

1. In the account of your interview with some gentlemen belonging to the untouchable class at Faridpur published in the issue of the *Young India* dated 14th May 1925, you have asked them to do things by way of self-purification. Now what do you think by self-purification? What are the outer manifestations of self-purification? Does the self-purification consist in *kayik*, *manasik* and *vachanik* purification or one of them alone?

Self-purification means cleansing oneself of all impurities whether of the mind, speech or body. The 'untouchable' friends were asked to think no evil, speak no untruth or abuse, and to keep the body pure by careful wash, pure food and avoidance of carrion or other impure food or intoxicating liquors or drugs.

2. If any class or individual [illegible] standard can they [illegible] safe. Moreover the days are gone when men [illegible] their virtue by permanent isolation.

Even if a person [illegible] the standard, and it is unattainable at once by most of us, he may not be regarded as an untouchable. It will go hard with us if that standard was applied to us.

3. There is no unity in food, drink or worship among all the Hindu classes. What do you think to be the first step to bring about the unity?

I am doing nothing to achieve such unity. Unity I hanker after is one of heart. It transcends these barriers and can subsist in spite of them. We worship the same God under diverse forms and names.

4. It is suggested that if entrance into public places of worship and confectionery shops be open to sanitarily clean Hindus, that will be the first step to bring about unity. What is your opinion about it?

Places of public worship should be open to all who obey the laws of common decency. Who shall judge the

standard of cleanliness in dress? These things are regulated not by law but by public opinion. A confectioner, if he is himself clean, would undoubtedly refuse to sell to those who are dirty. If he did not, he would lose his custom. But a confectioner who refuses to sell to an 'untouchable' because he is so-called, forfeits his right to carry on his business.

5. Your sense of untouchability is a difficult one. Even among higher class Hindus, they do not drink water and eat cooked food from the hands of their *asamskrit* children. Do you call this untouchability?

I do not call that untouchability. I have explained scores of times that there is no such thing as a fifth Varna in Hinduism. The 'untouchable', therefore, should have all the rights common to the four Varnas.

6. Some suggest that instead of putting too much stress on the drinking of water, it is better to try to remove the sense of superiority and inferiority from the heart of higher caste Hindus and increase mutual love and help. Do you approve of this suggestion?

I do approve of the suggestion where it is not made to cover hypocrisy. You shall judge a tree by its fruit. I never lay stress on drinking and eating. But I do and would when a man refuses to drink at the hands of an 'untouchable' because he is so-called. For, then, the refusal *is* a sign of arrogation of superiority.

7. To that end spread of Vaishnava teachings by religious Kirtana and religious feasting in a body irrespective of creed and caste is an easy and simple method. This method has been in vogue for more than four centuries. What is your opinion about this suggestion?

I have not studied the effect of these Kirtanas. But I would welcome any good method that will break down the wall of insolent superiority.

Young India, 2-7-'25

THE BOGEY OF BOYCOTT

This is the substance of what a correspondent writes in the course of a long letter:

> "Some of us Caste men tried and succeeded in having certain wells in some of the Bihar villages opened to the use of Harijans. But the Brahmana Pujaris nearby retorted by stopping the service in the village temple and the local Brahmanas threatened to stop all religious services at Shraddha, marriage and the like. This frightened the simple villagers. I feel tempted to offer Satyagraha, but I desist lest I might do so in anger. What would you advise in such cases?"

Not long ago there was a similar case near Trichinopoly. Dr. Rajan acted with decision. Himself a Brahmana by caste and Shudra by right of service, he defied the orthodox Brahmanas who had refused even to perform the funeral rights in the case of death in a reformer's family.

My advice, therefore, is that there is no occasion in such cases for Satyagraha. Those who regard untouchability as a sin must be prepared to suffer all the hardships of boycott and the like as a part of the process of purification and penance. In all humility they must learn to dispense with the outward form. Anything done in the name of God and for His sake needs no support from an officiating priest, whether it is a death or a marriage or a Shraddha. Anybody can unite a couple in marriage by reciting the sacred Mantras, whether it is Ramanama or any of the known formulae according to the tradition in which one has been brought up. God is known not by His thousand names only but by millions of names. Any name which comes from the heart and by which we can recognize Him is as good as any other or, rather the best of all for us. But these things can only be done by those who have the courage of their conviction, faith in themselves, faith in their cause and faith in a living God. This is not a movement in which faint-heartedness can be of any use. Only workers with stout hearts and irreproachable character

will be able to infect the villagers with their own strong convictions and enable them to do the right thing in the face of boycott or worse persecution.

Harijan, 4-3-'33

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HARIJAN v. NON-HARIJAN

'Rather than do constructive work among Harijans, will it not be better to create intense dissatisfaction amongst them with their condition and thus promote such self-help as they can generate among themselves? It is no use your trying to convert the Savarnas.' This was one of the questions that was asked at a meeting of workers. As it is an important question, it is as well to give the gist of the answer given by me at the meeting. The question betrays ignorance of the whole scope of the movement. To create dissatisfaction among the Harijans can bring no immediate relief to them and can only tend to perpetuate a vicious division amongst Hindus. The object of the movement is to do away with this utterly unnatural division and to secure for Harijans the simple justice to which they are entitled at the hands of Savarna Hindus. Thus the movement is one of repentance and reparation. Hence it is confined, on the one hand, to constructive work among Harijans and, on the other, to conversion of Savarnas by persuasion, arguments and above all, by correct conduct on the part of the reformers.

Another question discussed was, 'Do you not think that the improvement of the condition of starving peasants is more important than the service of Harijans? Will you not, therefore, form peasant organizations which will naturally include Harijans in so far as their economic condition is concerned?'

I wish that what the questioner says were true. Unfortunately, the betterment of the economic condition of peasants will not necessarily include the betterment of that of the Harijans. The peasant who is not a Harijan can rise

as high as he likes or opportunity permits him. The latter cannot own and use land as freely as the Savarna peasant. He cannot command the labour that he needs. In many places he cannot even buy the seed he requires. And assume for one moment that the Harijan peasant is able to better his economic condition equally with the non-Harijan. Even so, he will still labour under the numerous social disabilities he was labouring under before. Only, because of the very betterment he will feel them much more keenly than when he was a pauper. Therefore, a special organization for the service of Harijans is a peremptory want in order to deal with the special and peculiar disabilities of Harijans. Substantial improvement of these, the lowest strata of society, must include that of the whole society. Moreover, the ordinary peasant is by no means neglected. For instance, the All-India Spinners Association is solely engaged in bettering the peasant's economic condition by educating him to add a handicraft to husbandry and thus have an automatic insurance against famine and always a substantial addition to his scanty income.

Harijan, 15-6-'34

212

HARIJANS AND MILITARY TRAINING

Q: I am a Harijan Sevak. I believe in military training. May I encourage Harijans to enlist as recruits? Those who join the army are rid of fear and untouchability and learn self-respect. What is your advice?

A: You have gone to the wrong man with this question. You know that I do not believe in military training. Nor do I believe with you that Harijans who join the army are so suddenly transformed. But I should not make an attempt to dissuade those Harijans who voluntarily want to enlist as recruits. If sons of the well-to-do go in for military training and if Harijans would like to follow

their example, how can I prevent them? It is a difficult thing any day to teach the lesson of Ahimsa. How can one inculcate Ahimsa to those who are doubly suppressed? The wonder to me is that even among the suppressed there are some Harijans who have truly learnt the lesson of Ahimsa.

Harijan, 28-7-'40

213

MY LIFE

Q: Having dedicated yourself to Harijans, does not your life belong to them now?

A: To say that my life belongs to Harijans is only a half truth. The whole truth is that my life belongs to God, and, therefore, it belongs to Harijans, and for that matter the whole creation, and it is God who alone can keep me or take me away.

[illegible] (1933), 6-12-'32; p. 83

SECTION NINETEEN: HARIJAN COLLECTIONS

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DONATIONS

Untouchability cannot be removed by mere purses, no matter how fat they are. Not even a crore of rupees subscribed by a few millionaires can wipe out the stain, unless the hearts of the Caste Hindus are changed. Donations to the Harijan cause are no good except as a token of change of heart on the part of the donor.

[From a speech in Mangalore]
Harijan, 9-3-'34

215

BEGGING FOR HARIJANS

It is amazing how at small wayside stations poor people come in to put a few coppers into Gandhiji's outstretched palm for the benefit of the Harijans. Often he is too preoccupied to go to the carriage door. I have seen people coming unasked to pay their mite for the Harijans. They know that it is usual for him whenever he travels, to beg for the Harijans, and if preoccupation or silence makes him omit the task, they remind him of it.

The readers may be interested to know that during his recent stay in Delhi, he collected quite a fair amount at the evening prayers. Also Gandhiji gets a few thousand rupees every year for the Harijans by signing autographs. One day a young man asked for Gandhiji's autograph. He signed it, as usual in Hindi. The young man happened to be a Tamilian. But he did not ask Gandhiji to sign his name in English. Instead he said : "Please also sign in Tamil." "I shall try," said Gandhiji, "but you will have to pay

another five rupees." "I have paid ten, Mahatmaji," said the young man laughing, and he watched Gandhiji scratching his head to remember his Tamil alphabet and sign his name in Tamil, letter after letter. But the autograph was perfect without a mistake, so much so that the young man exclaimed: "It is flawless. Mahatmaji, your memory is wonderful." With these words, he gave another ten for the autograph. "But nothing for my memory feat? I have passed creditably and you must give me a prize." A third ten rupee note came immediately out of his pocket, and Gandhiji said in great delight: "Thirty rupees for the Harijans within a few seconds. They will bless you."

The figures of the evening collections at Delhi will be of interest (note the pies and even half-pies);

30-3-'42	Rs. 123– 0– 0
31-3-'42	„ 179– 3– 7½
1-4-'42	„ 227–11– 6
2-4-'42	„ 166–13– 9
3-4-'42	„ 102– 9– 9
Plus contributions "exacted" from Pressmen who had come to interview him an hour before his departure	„ 38– 0– 0
	Rs. 837– 6– 7½

Harijan, 26-4-'42

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HARIJAN COLLECTIONS

If the collections I make at railway stations and at evening prayer when I am out of Sevagram are any index to the progress of the removal of untouchability it must be very substantial, for I notice that the response is more liberal than before. Hardly a bystander at stations or a visitor to the prayer meeting refrains from giving his mite. Much need not be made of the response. But there can be no doubt that if the cause did not make any appeal, the response would be meagre, if any, whereas it was hearty and willing. It gave me great joy as I studied the smiling faces of those who gave. The Bombay collection for the seven meetings was Rs 4,000. Each day's collection showed a substantial rise on the previous day. Thus the first day's collection was Rs 205-5-6 and the last Rs 1,342-10-9.

Harijan, 24-5-'42

SECTION TWENTY: WIDER MEANING OF THE MOVEMENT

217

TOWARDS FELLOWSHIP OF FAITHS

In dealing with the monster of untouchability, my own innermost desire is not that the brotherhood of Hindus only may be achieved, but it essentially is that the brotherhood of man — be he Hindu, Musalman, Christian, Parsi or Jew — may be realized. For, I believe in the fundamental truth of all great religions of the world. I believe that they are God-given, and I believe that they were necessary for the people to whom these religions were revealed. And I believe that, if only we could all of us read the scriptures of the different faiths from the standpoint of the followers of those faiths, we should find that they were at bottom all one and were all helpful to one another.

This 'touch-me-not-ism' has not been confined to Harijans, but it has affected caste against caste, and religion against religion. I, for one, shall not be satisfied until, as the result of this movement, we have arrived at heart-unity amongst all the different races and communities inhabiting this land, and it is for that reason that I have invited the co-operation of all the people living in India and even outside.

Harijan, 16-2-'34

218

UNTOUCHABILITY BETWEEN HINDUS AND MUSLIMS

My Muslim correspondents say in effect: "You should be ashamed of bringing the charge of untouchability against the Muslim League. First cast out the beam from the Hindu eye before you attempt to deal with the mote in the Muslim eye. Has not the Hindu maintained for a thousand years complete boycott of Muslims ? He will not drink or eat with him. He will not intermarry. He will not even let his house to him. Can you conceive a more effective isolation of a whole community than the Hindu has carried out ? Will it not be a just nemesis if the Muslim now turns round and pays you in your own coin ? "

I have admitted as much. Whatever the Muslims do by way of retaliation will be richly deserved by Hindus. My question was and is, should they do so ? Does it behove a great political party to play upon religious prejudices ?

Whatever the Muslim League does or does not do, it behoves thoughtful Hindus to take note of the deserved taunt and purge Hinduism of its exclusiveness. It will not be protected by artificial barriers which have no sanction in ancient Hinduism or reason. Well did Maulana Abul Kalam Azad say the other day how sick he was of hearing the cry at railway stations of Hindu and Muslim tea or water. I know this touch-me-not-ism is deep-rooted in Hinduism as it is practised today. But there is no reason why it should be tolerated by Congressmen. If they will be correct in their behaviour, they will pave the way for a radical transformation of Hindu society. The message of anti-untouchability does not end in merely touching the so-called untouchables. It has a much deeper meaning.

Harijan, 1-6-'40

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ITS IMPLICATIONS

The vast meeting at Palni under the shade of the Temple was perfectly silent ; there were no noises. I seized the occasion to give the audience the implications of removal of untouchability. It began with touch but it would be a wooden thing, if it merely ended there. A Brahmana may be a depraved man in spite of his learning. It would be preposterous to call him one. A Brahmana is he who knows Brahma. It is character, not occupation that determines the man. The Bhangi is or should be on a par with the Brahmana in all social relations. There is no reason why he should not, other things being equal, occupy the chair which Maulana Abul Kalam Azad occupied with distinction. I would be happy to see the day when a Bhangi, working as such, is in the Presidential chair.

The ulcer of untouchability has gone so deep down that it seems to pervade our life. Hence the unreal differences : Brahmana and Non-Brahmana, provinces and provinces, religion and religion. Why should there be all this poison smelling of untouchability ? Why should we not all be children of one Indian family and, further, of one human family ? Are we not like branches of the same tree ?

When untouchability is rooted out, these distinctions will vanish and no one will consider himself superior to any other. Naturally, exploitation too will cease and co-operation will be the order of the day.

Harijan, 10-2-'46

NON-ENGLISH WORDS WITH THEIR MEANINGS

Abhisheka — anointing; sprinkling with water; bathing

Adi-dravida — pre-historic resident of Dravida; an untouchable

Advaita — literally, non-duality or absolute monism

Agraharam — part of a town where Brahmanas live

Ahimsa — non-violence; love

Antyaja — literally, last born, i.e., of 'lowest' caste or an untouchable

Asamskrit — unpolished; uncultured

Ashram — a place for spiritual retirement; Gandhiji's colony of workers

Ashrama — the four stages in an individual's life, viz., that of student, householder, dweller in the forest for meditation, and wandering ascetic and teacher

Ati-Shudra — of untouchable caste

Atman — soul; self

Avarna — outcaste

Bajri — a kind of Indian cereal

Bania — merchant or trader

Begar — forced labour

Bhajan mandali — devotional music circle

Bhajana — religious song

Bhangi — scavenger

Brahman — the Infinite

Chakram — the smallest coin in Travancore

Chamar — leather worker regarded as untouchable

Chandala — offspring of a Shudra father and a Brahmana mother, generally despised and treated as untouchable

Charkha — spinning wheel

Cheris — lanes inhabited by Harijans

Chhatralaya — hostel

Dandi — a chair carried on the shoulders

Darshan — sight of a god or an important person
Deenabandhu — lover of the poor, as Rev. C. F. Andrews was called
Dev-darshan — sight of a god
Dewan — Prime Minister of an Indian State
Dharma — religion ; duty
Dharmashala — free rest-house
Dharna — picketing
Dhed — an untouchable
Dhoti — cloth worn round the waist by men
Durbar — Royal or State Assembly ; State Government
Dwija — twice-born, i.e., the 'higher' castes which have an initiation ceremony when the boy reaches years of discretion, ushering him into a second birth
Ezhava — an untouchable caste of Travancore
Ganesh utsava — a festival in honour of god Ganesh
Garasiya — Rajput caste living in Gujarat and Saurashtra
Gayatri — a vedic prayer addressed to god Sun
Goonda — rowdy
Grama panchayat — a village council of five or more members
Grihastha — householder
Gurudev — the teacher, as Rabindranath Tagore was often called out of respect
Harijan Sevak Sangh — Association for service of the Harijans
Hartal — cessation of work ; strike
Himsa — violence
Jatha — group ; band ; party
Jawari — species of Indian corn
Kali — a goddess to whom animals are offered in sacrifice
Karma — one's deed
Kayik — relating to the body
Khaddar, Khadi — hand-spun, hand-woven cloth
Kirtana — reciting hymns or lyrics
Kshatriya — soldier caste
Lac-Lakh — one hundred thousand
Lungi — a piece of cloth wrapped round the waist by men

Mahajans — men of influence in a village
Manu-smriti — the laws of Manu, the famous law-giver of ancient India
Manasik — relating to the mind
Mandir — temple
Mantra — vedic hymn ; sacred prayer ; incantation
Maryada — restrictions ; a code of morality which lays down observance of certain restrictions in conduct, as e.g. not dining with members of other castes
Mehtar — scavenger
Moksha — salvation ; release from birth and death
Nair — a non-Brahmana high caste of Travancore and Malabar
Nama-shudra — an untouchable
Nambudri — a sect of Brahmanas in Travancore
Padmanabhaswami — God Padmanabha ; an epithet of Vishnu
Padmanabhadas — servant of God Padmanabha
Paisa — quarter of an anna, i.e., equivalent of an English farthing
Palkhi — palanquin
Panchama — literally fifth caste, i.e., untouchable
Pandit — learned man
Pariah — outcaste
Patita — a fallen creature
Prasad-Prasadam — sweets and such like offered to a god in worship
Puja — ceremonial worship
Pujari — priest in charge of ritual
Purda — veil
Raj — rule
Rama, Ramji — a name of God
Ramanama — the name of Rama or God
Ramaraksha — panegyric of god Rama, invoking his protection
Ramayana — a Hindu epic, describing life of Rama
Rishi — seer
Roti — flat, unleavened bread
Ryot — peasant

Sadhu — ascetic
Saheb — a European ; gentleman
Sanatana — ancient ; orthodox
Sanatanist — orthodox Hindu
Sandhyavandana — worship at twilight
Sannyas — renunciation of worldly possessions and attachments ; fourth stage in the life of a Brahmana
Sannyasi — wandering ascetic
Satyagraha — non-violent resistance
Satyagrahi — one who offers Satyagraha
Savarna — a member of one of the four castes
Sevak — literally, servant ; public worker
Shastra — authoritative work of Hinduism
Shastri — one versed in the Shastras
Shivji — name of the third god of the Hindu Trinity, regarded as bringing health to humanity
Shloka — verse
Shraddha — ceremony in honour of the dead
Shuddhi — purification
Shudra — member of the fourth caste ; manual worker
Sirdar — nobleman ; chief
Smriti — code of laws ; authoritative writing
Sati — virtuous woman or wife ; the custom of a widow burning herself to death with her husband on his funeral pyre
Swaraj — self-government
Taluka — an administrative unit consisting of a group of villages
Tantri — priest in charge of ritual
Tapasya — penance ; voluntary suffering
Tilak — a paste mark, often indicating caste or sect, worn on the forehead by Hindus
Udyogalaya — house for industries
Upanayana — initiation ceremony where a Hindu boy is invested with the sacred thread
Vachanik — relating to speech
Vaishnava — a sect of Hindus worshipping Vishnu
Vaishya — merchant caste
Vakil — lawyer

Varna — caste ; literally colour
Varnadharma — caste duties ; principle of hereditary occupations
Varnashrama — (four) castes and (four) stages of life according to Hinduism
Vidyapith — university
Zamindar — landlord

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